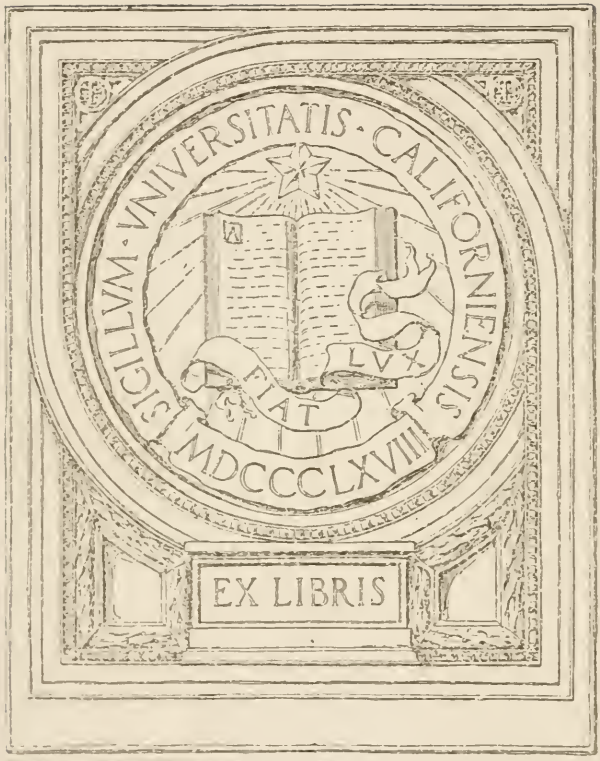
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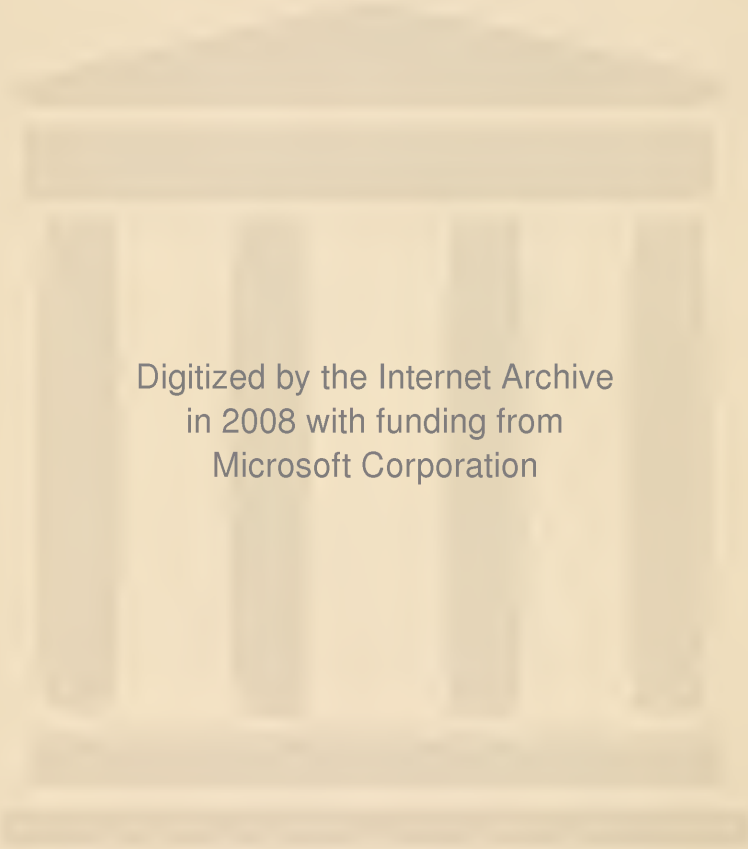

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THE TRUTH ABOUT BURNS

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MCMXXI

Byron

THE Dumfries portrait known as the Watson-Reid miniature was painted from the life by Alexander Reid, of Kirkinnan, a contemporary of Burns and well-known artist in his day. It was executed six months before the Poet's death. In a letter to Maria Riddell, dated 29th January, 1796, he says, "I am just sitting to Reid in this town for a miniature, and I think he has hit by far the best likeness of me ever taken." The frontispiece of the present volume is from a negative taken direct from the original in the National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, by Mr. Thomas Ferguson, of the Nursery Mills, Kilmarnock. It formed part of the Watson Collection.

THE TRUTH ABOUT BURNS

BY

D. McNAUGHT, J.P., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF 'THE CHARTERS OF KILMAURS'; 'KILMAURS PARISH AND BURGH'; 'PEOPLE'S EDITION OF BURNS'; EDITOR OF 'BURNS CHRONICLE'

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PREFACE

This volume is the outcome of many urgent representations from all quarters that the time had arrived for a new Life of Burns in the light of the countervailing evidence which has accumulated during the last quarter of a century.

As the general reader with no special leaning to Burns literature is usually at a loss to differentiate between biography and biography, unless on vague suspicions of partisanship, the proposal to add one more to the lengthy list was not alluring. It appeared to us that all that was required was a revisal of the text of the most widely-read biographies, with correcting notes and emendations setting forth the conclusions deducible from the widened field of ascertained facts.

But when we began the task, the conviction was forced upon us that, unless presented in their chronological sequence, these textual amendments lost cohesion and consequently much of their biographical value.

In the following pages we have endeavoured to preserve that sequence by a condensed narrative of the principal events of the Poet's life, the amount of space devoted to each being proportionate, so far as our judgment goes, to its importance as an operating influence on his conduct at certain junctures in his career which have been misconstrued or misrepresented by one-sided evidence.

To the diligent reader of the *Burns Chronicle* much of the evidence submitted is already familiar, and it is here presented for the first time in collected form for the purpose of facilitating investigation by every one desirous of forming a just estimate of the "passionate pilgrimage," in face of the greatest disadvantages and difficulties, of an inspired poet and great man, heir to the imperfections of our common humanity.

D. McNAUGHT.

KILMAURS, *September*, 1921.

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Robert Burns from the Miniature by
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THE ENVIRONMENT AND EARLY BIOGRAPHERS OF BURNS

Burns was born the year before the death of George II., whose grandson and successor, George III., reigned for the long period of sixty years (1760-1820), the first thirty-six of which synchronised with the earthly pilgrimage of the Poet. The Seven Years War, from which Britain emerged the dominant Power of the civilised world, came to an end in 1763. In the East, India was brought under her sway; while in the New World the conquest of Canada extended her supremacy over the greater part of the North American continent. The settled and richer part of this vast territory was soon after lost to her in the American War of Independence (1775-1782)—a war occasioned by the policy of a cabal of short-visioned politicians, tools of an arrogant and obstinate King who aimed at power as absolute and autocratic as ever did Charles I. This he endeavoured to accomplish by excluding men like Chatham from

power, and playing off faction against faction by a system of corruption and bribery which reduced what vestiges of representative government then existed to the hollowest of mockeries. The efforts of the King and his satellites to stifle public opinion served but to foster the growth of a threatening democratic spirit which had long been in evidence in the country, and which, in 1789, hailed the outbreak of the French Revolution as the advent of the millennium.

In Scotland the omens of unrest, clearly discernible decades before the upheaval in France, assumed a religious complexion. The Scottish Reformation was a social as well as a religious revolution, and this blending of the temporal and spiritual exerted a powerful influence in moulding the national character. For the succeeding century the political and religious, the civil and ecclesiastical, are so inextricably interwoven in the national history that it is difficult to distinguish between them. The reason may be found in the broad democratic basis on which the Reformers founded the Church of Scotland—equal representation of laity and clergy in the Church Courts—which, by the way, may also account for the democratic sympathies which have long been a marked feature of the national politics.

The civil and ecclesiastical powers were separ-

ately recognised by the Reformers, but without a clear line of demarcation between their respective provinces. Both were believed to be derived from God, and the one was considered the complement of the other—a kind of dual theocracy which contained the germs of future dissension. The Covenanting period was really a struggle between the two for predominance; and the ever-recurring internal divisions on the vexed question of Patronage, which culminated in the Disruption, are traceable to the same source. In the long period of comparative quiescence which followed the Revolution of 1689, the ecclesiastical power gradually acquired ascendency, either through the lethargy of the lay element, its incorporating alliance with the clerical during the persecuting times, or the reluctance of the more liberal-minded of the laity to bind themselves to a cast-iron creed by taking the oath of office.

In Burns's day the Kirk Session—the lowest court, composed exclusively of laymen with a clergyman presiding—had become an intolerable social tyranny, acting through the canons of the Church, arrogating to itself all the functions of local government, and interfering with personal liberty. Burns intuitively grasped the vital principles at stake, and struck

at the fatalistic doctrines of Calvinism and the atrophy of true religious sentiment and Pharisaism they had engendered, as paralysing influences on progressive thought in both Church and State affairs. "From such ideas of my Creator," he writes to Mrs. Dunlop, "good Lord deliver me. . . . Whatever mitigates the woes or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity. What think you, Madam, of my creed?" To this enunciation of the Brotherhood of Man, that pious, pure-minded lady of orthodox beliefs replied, "I can readily absolve every heterodoxy in your creed, nor is there any great room to fear your religion and mine should ever run counter." He revered the Covenanters, not for anything pertaining to their creed, but because they stood for freedom of conscience, and suffered for it unto the death.

It was inevitable that a man with the mental endowments of Burns would become an unsparing censor of the social and political abuses which marked the epoch in which he lived—an epoch of eruptive manifestations which have not even yet subsided. His field of observation was the Scotland he knew; his philosophy of life was the fruit of what he saw and heard reacting on his

powerful and sensitive mind, and his genius did the rest. Rousseau, Goethe, and the German philosophers were to him little more than names. He was a pure native product, in whom the *ingenium Scotorum* of a century found full and forcible expression. "His voice," says Mr. Henley, "has gone ringing through the courts of Time these hundred years and more, and is far louder and far clearer now than when it first broke on the ear of man." From Mossgiel it resounded near and far, and a storm of acclamation from the enlightened everywhere greeted his daring attacks on the catalogued dogmas and pagan formalism which then usurped the name of religion.

Democracy was awakening from its sleep of generations and demanding its just rights. Thrones were shaken to their foundations; the privileges of a selfish and self-seeking oligarchy everywhere menaced; and knavery and corruption in high places dragged to the light of day. Pitt, with statesmanlike sagacity, foresaw the danger, and endeavoured to arrest it by yielding to the popular demands the concessions embodied in his abortive Reform Bill of 1785. But circumstances were too strong for him, and, when the French volcano burst forth, he had perforce to drift with them.

It was in this historical setting that Burns was called upon to play his part. His marvellous gifts were recognised by all with whom he came in contact, but, like all able men doomed to lead their lives under ruling mediocrity or stupidity, he was more feared than loved by the reigning powers. Humble citizen as he was, his mental vigour everywhere brought him into prominence, and his sayings were quoted as those of an authority. His tongue—a right eloquent one, according to all accounts—sometimes outran his discretion, whereupon the powers that were promptly reminded him that his business was that of an exciseman, and not a meddler with affairs of State. After he became a Government official he was a shorn Samson whose duty was to "be silent and obey"; and his daily realisation of his dependent position damped his energies and restrained the free action of his powers. Nevertheless, amid his drudgery, he found time to set down his thoughts both in prose and verse, but in such scattered and disconnected fashion that the fragments must be pieced together if we would discover the principles which governed the workings of his mind. Party politics he held in contempt and treated with derision. When called upon to choose between political rivals, his choice was dictated more by personal pre-

dilection than party programmes. Pitt he ever extolled; for Fox and Burke he expressed little admiration. Most of his Dumfries friends were Whigs, but with him names counted for little.

The infamous Coalition, which thwarted the policy of Pitt, set on flame his ardent conviction that the people should make it impossible for such men to rule. In his own words, it was the "alarming system of corruption which pervaded the connection between the Executive power and the House of Commons," which filled him with indignation. This was the key-note of his politics. The revolution he desired was a Parliament really representative of the people, with purity and probity in the making and administration of the law. One has only to peruse *The Dream*, *The Earnest Cry and Prayer*, *When Guilford Gude*, his rhyming letter to Graham of Fintry on the Dumfries election, *The Jolly Beggars*, *The Tippling Ballad*, his humorous rhyme to the editor of the *London Star*, and certain of his letters, to realise the extent and accuracy of his knowledge of contemporary history. Nor is it difficult to discern his interpretation of passing events if attentive note is taken of the thumb-nail sketches he gives of the principal actors, which are as full of vigour as true to the life.

His earliest compositions which caught the public ear were pungent pasquinades aimed at prominent members of the rigid Calvinistic or Old Light party of the Church, whom he scourged so mercilessly with the ridicule of *The Twa Herds*, the *Holy Fair*, and *Holy Willie's Prayer*, that he roused them to retaliate with a fire of ecclesiastical artillery which has never altogether ceased from that day to this. At a later date, he turned as keen an eye on the political prosecutions exemplified in the cases of Palmer and Muir, but save a cryptic expression in a letter to Thomson (1793), enclosing *Scots Wha Hae*, he did not give himself away to his enemies on that score, at least by the written word. Washington was one of his heroes; the French Revolution the dawn of a new world which realised his fondest hopes of a regenerated humanity. His Jacobitism was really sentimental vapouring, for it is impossible to conceive of his contemplating with equanimity the re-incarnation of either of the Charleses, or of the Old Pretender and his son. It had, however, its root in the same soil as his Jacobinism, and that was his deep-seated conviction that the British Government, as he knew it, was in urgent need of a drastic purging and purifying which could be accomplished constitutionally by the people themselves. Speaking

of the 1715 and 1745 rebellions he says, "That they (the Stuarts) failed, I bless God; but cannot join in the ridicule against them"; and writing to the editor of the *Star*, he refers to them as, "the wrong-headed House of Stuart."

It could not have been otherwise with Burns. From his earliest youth, he looked upon hereditary privilege and class distinctions as essentially outcomes of feudal might against right. Conscious of his own powers, he felt all the more acutely the handicap of his humble birth; and he early gave expression to his estimate of the existing social conditions in compositions like the *Epistle to Davie*, *The Twa Dogs*, and *Man was Made to Mourn*—the last-named his first attempt at versifying in the English tongue. He had yet to learn that counsels of perfection in connection with the body politic leave out of sight the vagaries of human nature in the mass when infuriated by passion; and are based upon optimistic theories which the experience of the ages has discredited.

The philosophy of these early poems is founded on his own limited experience. To his latest breath he retained a prejudice—Gilbert calls it jealousy—against people in a higher social position than himself. In *A Man's a*

Man—perhaps the most misread and misapplied poem in the language—he reveals, when almost within sight of the grave, his matured views of the social relations. Poverty of itself is not a saving grace; nor is every man a man in God's own image. It is the upright, honest man however poor whom he crowns with royal honours; it is sense and worth, wherever found, which ought to rule in high places. When the Revolution in France developed into anarchy and the bloodthirsty tyranny of the monsters it had brought forth to threaten liberty everywhere, Burns repudiated their debased and debasing creed, and volunteered to defend his country against their machinations. He had no occasion to recant; his aspirations were for the reform, not the destruction, of the British Constitution. Jacobite or Jacobin, he was always a patriot and loyal subject, although he had imbibed in some degree the Scottish prejudice against the House of Hanover. He attended the first meeting called to consider the formation of a Volunteer Corps in Dumfries. He took the oath of allegiance to the King; was balloted for like the others, both officers and men; and was elected a member of the select committee of eight entrusted with the conduct of business.

Why he was so perturbed because of his

presentation to the Dumfries Library of De Lolme's book on the British Constitution as "a Creed of British liberty," is somewhat of an enigma.[1] De Lolme was a naturalised British subject who had witnessed the horrors of the French Revolution and founded his political opinions upon that experience. He belauds the limited monarchy of Great Britain and its representative institutions along with the history of their evolution; and condemns Republicanism as tending to corruption and the tyranny of the few. He dedicates his work, which is still interesting reading, to King George II., and commends his Coalition Ministry despite the want of "human wisdom" observable in their policy.

A long rhyming rigmarole of crude Republicanism, entitled "The Tree of Liberty," has been ascribed to Burns, but it is as certain as evidence can make it that he never wrote a line of what Mr. Henley aptly describes as, mere "doggerel trash." No holograph of it can be produced, and no printed copy has been discovered of earlier date than that of Robt.

[1] The book was presented, along with *Humphrey Clinker*, *Julia De Roubigné*, and Knox's *History of the Reformation*, as an acknowledgment of the honour conferred on him by his election as a free member of the Library "out of respect and esteem for his merits as a literary man."

Chambers, in 1838. The newly-founded American Republic undoubtedly influenced Burns's opinions, but he never dreamed of applying them to a settled form of government, of which, unlike that of France, democracy was a constituent part which only required widening and strengthening to render it predominant.[1] Had he lived to see the fruition of the French Revolution in the lust for conquest and military despotism of Napoleon, *Does Haughty Gaul* would not have been the only lyric of its kind bequeathed to us ; his patriotism would assuredly have blazed forth in verse worthy of Trafalgar and Waterloo. Whig and Tory in Dumfries were so obsessed with a wholesome fear of the excesses of the French Revolution, that scarce a man among them had the slightest toleration for any leaning to the side of the French proletariat.

Whatever enquiry was made concerning Burns's loyalty ended, we are safe in saying, in his acquittal, for no more was ever heard of it, and his hopes of professional promotion remained

[1] Again and again he makes his position clear. "Whatever might be my sentiments of republics, ancient or modern, as to Britain, I ever abjured the idea. A constitution, which, in its original principles, experience has proved to be every way fitted for our happiness, it would be insanity to reject for an untried visionary theory."

unaffected.[1] We have travelled far since then. In the light of modern days we wonder at the puerility of mind that could call a man in question for expressing the opinion that George Washington was a greater man than William Pitt, high though the latter stood in his estimation. He was constantly surrounded by eavesdropping enemies, writhing under his scourge, whose prejudiced evidence has been repeated *ad nauseam* down to the present day, the resultant of which has been that the flotsam and jetsam of editorial tradition is considered in many quarters more sacred than the truth itself.

It must ever be matter of profound regret that Burns's first biographers had little or no first-hand knowledge of their subject, and were therefore dependent on outside sources for most of their information. And never was the private life and personality of a great man so ruthlessly invaded and barbarously dissected as by the early biographers of Robert Burns. Kirkpatrick Sharpe, who knew him in the flesh, after a perusal of Dr. Currie's biography, penned this note,—

[1] In 1857, Mr. James MacFadzean, excise officer, when stationed in Somerset House, searched the *Register of Censures* in use in Burns's time, and found nothing recorded against him. Had he lived till August 1797, he would have been promoted to the Supervisorship of Dunblane District. (*Burns Chronicle*, No. XII., 1903.)

"When authors die, what *lies* people who *might* have seen and known them tell! I never now read anything about Burns without thinking he hath been peculiarly unlucky [in his biographers]."[1]

Heron, who may be described as a literary waif of much learning and little principle, had a passing acquaintance with Burns, and, it is said, harboured a lasting grudge against him because of the humorous references to his failings in the *Epistle to Dr. Blacklock*. His acquaintance with Burns never approached intimacy; moreover, he was not resident in Dumfries nor its neighbourhood during the closing years of the Poet's life. From all accounts, he was a man of dissolute character and egregious vanity, who ended a wasted life as a literary hack in London, partly dependent upon charity. His pamphlet of 1797 leaves the impression that he had a reflex motive in dwelling upon the imperfections of Burns, as if they were congenital characteristics of all men of genius, in which category he imagined himself included.

Dr. Currie (1800) resided in Liverpool, and never saw Burns but once, and then only on the street for a few minutes on a chance visit to Dumfries in 1792. He makes this admission himself in a letter to John Syme, dated the day

[1] See *Burns Chronicle*, No. XV., 1906.

after Burns's funeral, asking particulars of his death and the nature of his last illness, regarding which certain rumours had already reached his ears. He knew absolutely nothing of the personal side of Burns; and being entirely dependent upon others for his biographical material, he very probably drew upon Heron's essay as a likely source of information, though he characterised Heron's interference in the matter as "a scandalous thing" which called for strong remonstrance.

In the *Life of Dr. Currie*, written by his son, appear the letters of Currie to John Syme, from the tenor of which it is perfectly clear that he coveted the honour of being the first biographer of Burns,[1] notwithstanding his protestations to the contrary and lukewarm recommendation of others nominated for the task. The comparative neglect of Heron as an authority from that day to this is perhaps accounted for by the eclipse of his short essay by the more extended and laboured

[1] He was a relative of Mrs. Dunlop and an intimate friend of Syme—an honourable and most estimable man who did not, we believe, knowingly set aught down in malice. He strongly objected to Maria Riddell being entrusted with the writing of the biography. He selected his own informants and consequently took upon himself all responsibility for their utterances. As for the erroneous dating of some of Burns's letters, it is only fair to state that he did not always quote from the originals, but from copies or the rough drafts left among the poet's papers.

one of Currie's following so closely on its heels. Currie's informants were ostensibly Gilbert Burns and John Syme,[1] who both went to Liverpool in the autumn of 1797 to confer with him, but who both disclaimed responsibility—Gilbert in most pointed terms—for many mis-statements which appeared in the biography, the more flagrant of which were contradicted by Alexander Peterkin in an Edinburgh edition of Currie, published in 1815. About this date first appeared the exculpatory evidence contained in the letters of Gilbert Burns, James Gray, Alexander Findlater, and George Thomson, close friends of the Poet, with whom, strange to say, Dr. Currie had held no communication. Had Peterkin omitted the "Life" of Currie, and rewritten it in the light of the fresh evidence, instead of prefacing it with critiques—trenchant as they are—of Currie, Jeffrey, Sir Walter Scott, and Josiah

[1] From Maria Riddell's letters, published in the *Burns Chronicle* (Nos. XXIX. and XXX., 1919, 1920) we learn that she also had some hand in the Currie biography. Her contribution appears to have dealt particularly with Clarinda, with whom she had opened up a correspondence. All that Dr. Currie says regarding his informants is, that they included "Syme and others." Gilbert Burns repeatedly expressed his belief that Dr. Currie was misled by his informants on certain crucial points; and Mrs. Sarah Burns Hutchinson, daughter of James Glencairn Burns, writing us thirty years ago, remarked, "My father often said it was disgraceful the statements made out by people who lived in the poet's time, containing, as they did, so much falsehood and exaggeration of the events of his life."

Walker, he would have run a better chance of superseding Currie as a biographer. The last three he takes severely to task for the manner in which they had discharged their duties, substantially accusing them of doing little beyond paraphrasing Currie, with the addition of a few unimportant extensions of the text for which they gave no authority but their own.

It should be observed that Jeffrey's and Scott's contributions to the biography, in 1809, occur as incidents in their reviews of *Cromek's Reliques* in which no biography appears. Scott wrote anonymously in the *Quarterly Review* which makes Peterkin's onslaught all the more piquant. Scott's high-toned Toryism is apparent all through the article. Sympathetic and appreciative as for the most part it is, he dwells regretfully on the handicap of Burns's lowly origin, and styles him a "plebeian"—at best a "high-souled plebeian." Lord Jeffrey also adopts a very lofty style in discoursing on Burns, as if it were a condescension to take notice of a poet whom he names in his opening sentence along with Thomas Dermody and Stephen Duck. In the same sentence he designates Burns "the greatest of our poetical prodigies," but further on he proceeds to say that it is tantamount to an insult to his memory to call

him a prodigy at all. In 1809, Jeffrey had not properly digested his subject, as will appear when we have occasion to quote from his writings of later date. At the beginning of last century he was the autocrat of criticism in Scotland, his commendation or condemnation making or unmaking all aspirants to literary fame. Byron, in his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, compares him to the English judge of the same name of "Bloody Assize" memory, and adds, "He sentenced Letters as he sentenced men."

Irvine (1804) may be dismissed as an unblushing Currie plagiarist. Josiah Walker (1811) in his piebald dissertation, is compelled, apparently against his will, to give the lie direct to the exaggerations in connection with Burns's life in Dumfries, but in other parts of the narrative he ventilates most ungenerous inuendoes from suppositions of his own conception, for which he received a severe castigation from Professor Wilson in his famous Essay on Burns.

These writers were too near their subject to obtain accurate impressions of its proportions. Mr. Roscoe, the friend of Dr. Currie, acknowledged that the evidence submitted by Peterkin would have greatly modified, if not fundamentally

changed, the attitude of that biographer had he been in possession of the facts before his death, which occurred in 1805.[1] But the mischief was done and could not readily be undone. Currie's *Life of Burns* had remained unchallenged for over twelve years, and, being the work of an author of undoubted character and good intentions, it held the field practically for half a century as the one and only authority on the subject. The letters which passed between Currie and Syme have been published, but without Syme's side of the correspondence, which of course leaves us in the dark concerning the nature and extent of the information communicated by Syme and incorporated in the biography.[2] If Currie had other informants we know them not; on the other hand, Peterkin calls his witnesses in open court and puts them in the witness-box.

Currie's influence is clearly discernible in the

[1] William Roscoe, the historian of *Lorenzo De Medici*, was introduced to Burns by Maria Riddell, and some letters passed between them in 1795. Washington Irving, in his *Sketch Book*, pays a high compliment to the character and abilities of Mr. Roscoe.

[2] Maria Riddell seems to have communicated what she knew on some subsidiary points, but she advised Currie not to depend too much on Syme; notwithstanding "all his *bon coeur* and *bona volonte*." He was of careless business habits, always in arrears of work which he was constantly trying to overtake by hurry and bustle.

biographies which followed. The authors evidently had little else to guide them, for original investigation does not bulk largely in any of their narratives. Gilbert Burns has been severely blamed because he did not take advantage of the opportunity of doing justice to his brother in the eighth (really the ninth) edition of Currie (1820) of which he was appointed editor. The truth is, as the correspondence proves, he was not allowed a free hand; criticism and correction of Currie were debarred, and his editorial manuscripts were so continuously censored that he to all intents and purposes relinquished the task and left Currie's *Life* practically as he found it. He might have done much for the memory of his brother had he made a determined effort to combat the opposing influences; but he was so weighted with a sense of the debt of gratitude the Burns family owed to Dr. Currie that he frankly confesses he shrank from the distasteful task of contradicting him. In his reply to the reproaches of Mr. Roscoe (10th Dec. 1817) he defines his attitude in these words,—"As it would ill become me to do anything which I know to be disagreeable to Dr. Currie's friends, I shall alter what I have written so as to make as little allusion to Dr. Currie's work as a sense of my duty to my brother's memory will allow." The

practical application of this editorial confession need not be dwelt upon.[1]

In 1819, the Rev. Hamilton Paul, of Ayr, subsequently minister of Broughton, published a new sketch of the Poet's life, in which he contends that Burns simply conformed to the practices of his contemporaries, and was not more culpable than they.

Lockhart (1828) accepts Currie and Walker as infallible authorities on the earlier part of Burns's history ; it was the incidents of his closing years which, in his opinion, required to be supplemented ; and his supplementary information, like the greater part of Currie's, was derived from the testimony of anonymous witnesses.[2] No satisfactory test can be applied to testimony of that kind ; still, it has been found possible to discredit certain parts of it by careful collation of contemporary facts. In his preface he apologises for attempting to improve upon Currie's biography, and yet he strongly condemns Currie for accepting bare assertions without the slightest enquiry as to their reliability. Heron's " rash

[1] See George Thomson's letter to Professor Wilson (14th January, 1818, *Burns Chronicle*, No. XIV.) ; also " The Earnock MSS." (*Burns Chronicle*, Nos. VII. and VIII.).

[2] Scott Douglas's annotations on Lockhart's text correct many errors of fact on which he had been misinformed or had noted without sufficient enquiry.

and sweeping statement" regarding the Poet's life in Dumfries, he says, should have been put to severest test. His remarks upon "the extraordinary injurious reports, the essence of which Dr. Currie thought it his duty to extract and circulate," were evidently inspired by the letters published by Peterkin, particularly the letter of Gilbert Burns complaining that "what Dr. Currie had written of the latter years of his brother's life was based solely on the reports which had been propagated, the substance of which he had incorporated in the biography, and thereby given a very exaggerated view of the failings of his brother at that period."[1]

If Lockhart believed these reports to be untrustworthy, it may well be asked why he "thought it *his* duty" to give them wider circulation by quoting them in full, thereby deliberately committing the offence for which he condemns Currie and Heron? In his summing up of the Dumfries period his findings are that Burns was not addicted to solitary drinking, that drink never interfered with the punctual and regular discharge of his duties as an exciseman, and that "all the charges which have been insinuated are all false"—

[1] Gilbert, in a letter to Thomson (19th January, 1826), expresses the fear that Lockhart's *Life* "would probably contain some contemptible and injurious gossip."

logical deductions from the evidence submitted by Peterkin, to which expression could have been given without digging up the garbage which that evidence had compassionately buried.

One good result of Lockhart's *Life* was the splendid tributes it drew from Thomas Carlyle and Professor Wilson in their reviews of that work. In computing the biographical value of these estimates of the Poet, it must be borne in mind that the writers were descanting on the text of Lockhart, and not conducting an independent examination based on their own researches. Both articles proceed on the facts as submitted by Lockhart, with little or no addition to the subject matter of the volume under review.

Robert Chambers at a later date (1838) accomplished much good work by personal, painstaking efforts to collect what still remained of contemporary evidence. Much more has come to light since his labours ended, which, had it been then available, would have greatly modified his deferential attitude towards the armchair biographers and theorising essayists who then monopolised the chief seats in Burns literature. The revised edition (1896) by Dr. William Wallace not only brings the text up-to-date, but contains a mass of most valuable information in the notes and

appendices which fully maintain the Chambers tradition.

William Scott Douglas (1871), who annotated an edition of Lockhart in 1882, never attempted a formal Life of the Poet, but scattered through his Kilmarnock and 6 vol. Edinburgh editions is a wealth of notes and editorial comments which practically amount to the same thing, and entitle him to a very high place amongst Burns editors.[1] The spade work he accomplished, more solid than showy, marks him out as one of the most diligent and independent workers in the Burns field. The editions we refer to have been frequently exploited by other writers with scant acknowledgment of Mr. Douglas's labours.

Granting that these early writers were conscientious in the use they made of their information, such as it was, in most cases it is the conscientiousness of the candid friend whose office it is to dilate upon our faults and magnify our errors. It is the substitution of unsubstantiated assertions for evidence and the brutal frankness of the terms employed in discoursing upon Burns's frailties of the flesh, which offend and inspire every Scotsman interested in the national literature to

[1] His "Summary of the Life," in his Kilmarnock edition, is a handy and reliable storehouse of information. It was Mr. Scott Douglas who, in 1850, first placed Highland Mary in her proper place in the chronology of the biography of the Poet.

do all that in him lies to make sure that nothing but the truth and the whole truth is allowed to remain unchallenged on the record. For decades after his death there was scarce a wastrel or loafer in Dumfries but tried to deflect a glimmer of his glory in his direction by conjuring up in his muddled imagination marvellous tales of the high jinks he had shared with Burns in the Globe Tavern or elsewhere. George Gilfillan, a Scottish clergyman of considerable literary fame in his day, who committed himself to most uncharitable opinions of Burns in *Hogg's Instructor* as far back as 1847, raked the gutters of Dumfries for garbage of this sort, which he incorporated in a *Life of the Poet* as appendix to a pretentious two volume edition (1878) which teems with editorial blunders and inexcusable ignorance of essential details. No right-thinking man can read Gilfillan on Burns without mixed feelings of pain and pity for the author, who condemned his work to well-merited oblivion by ignoring the obligation which rests upon all writers who profess to differentiate between facts and palpable fictions based on contemptible, mouldy, malevolent gossip.

To form a just estimate of the life-history of any man, more especially an extraordinary man like Burns, we must make ourselves acquainted

with the social conditions and manners and customs of the people amongst whom he lived and moved, lest we err by applying standards of conduct altogether different from those which then obtained.

In Scotland, during the eighteenth century, class distinctions were sharply defined, mainly by the style of living, which depended upon the means at disposal for lavish and ostentatious display in the cook's and butler's departments of the household. In the rural districts, the old nobility and gentry formed the aristocracy; the bonnet lairds, farmers, tradesmen, cotters, and farm labourers, the middle and lower classes. In the towns the feudal influence was also strong, but not without challenge by the ever-growing power of the manufacturing, professional, and mercantile classes—a power resulting from the silent revolution of class relations which the wealth derived from the new industries rendered possible.

Born a plebeian, Burns, by the force of genius, burst the barriers of caste, and spent more than one-fourth of his short life in society far removed from that of his humble birth. While retaining many of the characteristics of the class from which he sprang, he was by nature too impressionable to avoid ordering his conduct by the canons in

vogue amongst his daily associates. And it is the melancholy truth that the social habits of the upper classes of that day are the reverse of pleasant reading in the history of civilisation in Scotland.[1] The outstanding feature was a "savage hospitality" which, by insistence, compelled the guests to eat to the point of repletion—a merciful preliminary to the deluge of drink which invariably followed. There was no escaping these post-prandial carousals, which were of daily occurrence. Toast succeeded toast almost without pause, failure to respond to any one of which was considered a personal insult. As guest after guest succumbed to the trying ordeal, they were carried off to bed by the attendants, or trundled home in the handiest vehicle available, if the distance was at all negotiable.[2] No disgrace attached to exhibitions of this kind. On the contrary, the five or six-bottle man was looked upon in much the same light as a modern champion of the golf course or tennis green; and to be the last to fall beneath the table was

[1] We refer the reader to Mackintosh's *History of Civilisation in Scotland* and other authorities on the subject. Creech, in his *Edinburgh Fugitive Pieces*, describing the state of society in the Scottish capital, in 1783, says,—"The term 'fine fellow' was applied to one who could drink three bottles, and who ridiculed religion and morality as folly and hypocrisy."

[2] See Burns's letter to William Cruickshank (Mauchline, 3rd March, 1788, Appendix A).

accounted not only a great accomplishment but proof positive of the finished gentleman. The national drink was claret; in the humbler ranks it was "tippeny," and occasionally a stronger kind of ale. It was not till the middle of the century that whisky began to supplant these liquors, and the drinking of this fiery product of the Highland distilleries did not improve matters.

From what Burns says of the convivial customs of his day, intemperance was not a predominant vice among the common people, but amongst the gentry and beggars,—the top and bottom of the social scale. In *Halloween*, which was then a representative social festival of the classes between these extremes, the only mention of drink is a parting glass of "strunt" or weak toddy. There is no mention of drink in the *Cotter's Saturday Night*. But in the centres of population, the bad example of their superiors had begun to exert a corrupting influence on the common people, most observable in their behaviour on high days and holidays. Burns's description of his leaving sale at Ellisland (Letter to W. Sloan, 1st Sept. 1791) is a lurid example of the popular appetite for dissipation when facilities were provided for its indulgence. In Edinburgh, as well as in the other larger cities, the professional

and leisured classes repaired at noon to their favourite tavern for alcoholic refreshment as part of the daily round of social duty. The evenings were spent in oyster cellars, where ladies of quality washed down the bivalves with draughts of porter, and their male escorts remained after their departure to refresh themselves to a late hour with stronger potations. Commercial transactions were cemented by an adjournment to the nearest hostelry, and a certain quantity of drink was part of the stipulated fee when engaging an advocate.

Tavern life was then the universal fashion. Friends met daily in these establishments to discuss the news; and it was the recognised custom for visitors to dispense their hospitality by inviting their friends to the inn which happened to be their temporary quarters. Dr. Edgar, the ecclesiastical historian of Mauchline, describes the period in which Burns lived as "a rude, rough age, in which gross licentiousness and shameless perfidy prevailed to an extent that many people have no idea of." He had explored the shady side of social history in the public records, and in the above extract he has given us an echo of "the tune of the times." The Kirk Sessions had failed utterly as a restraining influence; their inquisitorial methods,

degrading punishments, and Holy-Willie officials had resulted in their being held up to ridicule and scorn. So much was the laugh against them that the session clerk of Mauchline was moved, in 1788, to append this comical apology to one of the minutes,—"Notwithstanding the great noise there are *only twenty fornicators* since last Sacrament."[1]

It is also an instructive commentary on the moral code of the period that a woman of the social standing and education of Mrs. M'Lehose could look upon *liaisons scandaleuses* as venial offences when the victims happened to be on a lower social level than herself.[2] She knew of Jean Armour's first twins and wished the birth of the second "happily over"; nevertheless she lived in the hope of being free to marry Burns, without ever a thought of the wrong done to the mason's daughter at Mauchline.[3] Margaret Chalmers, to whom, according to her own testimony, Burns paid his addresses, was also aware of his relations with Jean Armour. Yet she says nothing which leads us to believe

[1] Dundonald Parish supplies similar evidence. (See Appendix C.)

[2] Letter Mrs. M'Lehose to Burns, November 1791, also Clarinda to Burns, 5th March, 1788. (See Appendix B.)

[3] She visited Jenny Clow and she must have known of May Cameron, another victim of the "fashionable failing" which was then looked upon with an indulgent eye by feminine respectability.

that her rejection of his advances was for that reason alone. When we find such latitudinarian views in active operation in the circles in which these women moved, that mental vision must be oblique indeed which can see nothing but the negation of all moral principle in Highland Mary's acceptance of a forsaken, penitent lover, who was "the father of one illegitimate child and prospective father of another." On the lowest level we can place her, she was no lower than her betters, who would have acted precisely as she did, not from any vicious taint derived from her peasant ancestry, as Mr. Henley would have it, but solely from those impulses of human nature which, in the sexual relations especially, level all class distinctions.

The foregoing sketch of society manners, when Burns made his appearance in Edinburgh, would be misleading without reference to the leaven in the mass which undoubtedly existed. Many there were whose notions of propriety deterred them from indulging in the excesses which characterised the majority. But drink was an essential feature of all public and private functions; temperance was the exception; and teetotalism had not made even a beginning. Dumfries, to speak in measured terms, was no exception to the general rule. The "Whistle Contest" is

a pregnant suggestion of the kind of life led there by the middle and upper classes. Three men of high position deliberately engaged in a drinking bout, in 1789, to settle which of them could consume the greatest amount of claret, and still retain breath enough to blow a cadger's whistle. It would have been nothing short of the miraculous if a man of the temperament of Burns had succeeded, every day of his life, in resisting the temptations to which he was so constantly exposed. Excesses of that kind served to aggravate the congenital weakness of heart-action which his arduous work at Mount Oliphant, while but a stripling, rendered a life-long infliction.

His detractors, with singular unanimity, found their charges against him in the last five years of his life, which were spent in Dumfries in the environment we have described. He was then over thirty years of age, and had therefore reached a period of life at which, according to accepted belief, a man's habits become second nature. Up to the date of his father's death, in 1784, his conduct was guided by the precepts and example of that worthy man. Most of his biographers have unaccountably ignored this feature of his early manhood, and have consequently created false impressions which are not easily erased. Had he lived and died a poor

farmer or humble cotter, the mortal part of him would have been laid beneath the turf of some country churchyard, and his faults and frailties buried with him. But his genius exalted him above his fellows ; he was Saul among the people of his day ; in Dumfries all eyes were turned upon him. The immortal part of him is beyond cavil or question. What boots it then to dig up his bones only to show they were shapen in iniquity ! Read the Burns literature of these hundred years and more, and you will find that every writer bent on belittling him has resorted to this ghoulish expedient.

In discoursing on Sterne, who was no saint, Augustine Birrell effectively reproves these resurrectionists in words which apply to the literary celebrities of all ages alike. "As for your opinion of Sterne as a man of conduct, is it worth while having one ? It is a poor business bludgeoning men who bore the brunt of life a long century ago, and whose sole concern now with the world is to delight it." The pity is, that as these writers cannot be allowed unchallenged possession of the field, discussions are kept alive which long ago ought to have been buried in oblivion. The truculent tone adopted by some recent commentators has roused a strong feeling of resentment in Burnsian circles, which

has begotten a determination to put everything recorded by the biographers to the test of contemporary evidence and that which has come to light since their day, of which they were either culpably or carelessly ignorant. This—the only effective method of reply—has been thrust upon the Poet's admirers, and we trust it will be persisted in till the cobwebs of falsehood, pretentious ignorance, and biographical cuckooing are swept away, and the truth made manifest.

CHAPTER I

THE COTTAGE, MOUNT OLIPHANT, AND LOCHLEA.

Burns was the son of a market gardener who became a farmer on borrowed capital, thereby imposing upon himself a life of hopeless drudgery in attempting the impossible on the poor soils of Mt. Oliphant and Lochlea. Byron was a peer; Burns is set down in loose verbiage as a peasant, —the French *paysan*, a country man or worker in the fields—but the genius of neither was enhanced or diminished by the accident of his birth, which, however, accounts for the dissimilarity observable in the manifestations of their genius, notwithstanding an almost perfect accordance in fundamental *motif*. In no grade of society is there a uniform level; there is an aristocracy and a residuum at all levels. Amongst the peasantry we have an ascending gradation, from the moral turpitude and mental atrophy of that class in France, depicted in Zola's *La Terre*, to the moral rectitude and mental vigour

of the peasant aristocracy of Scotland, of which the father of the Poet is a representative.

William Burnes (so he spelt his name in two syllables, changed to Burness, and latterly to the monosyllable Burns, by his sons) was a king among men measured by the standard of true manhood. There is no figure in the life story of the Poet more pathetic in its native dignity than this prematurely-old peasant aristocrat, struggling bravely against adversity and failing health, and doing his best with an attenuated purse to render the lot of his children less arduous and depressing than his own. He came of *paysan* ancestry through many generations—hard-visaged, keen-eyed, spare-bodied men, toil-worn before their time, who read their Bibles, and argued with perspicuity on the points of faith, the wrongs of the Auld Stewarts, and the scarlet sin of Prelacy. In that frugal home of his in the Mearns the meal-garnel was not capacious enough for a redundancy of mouths, so he and his brother, Robert, had to go forth into the world to push their fortunes. They both gravitated to Ayrshire—William to Fairlie (then called Old Rome Forest) where he acted as gardener to the laird of that ilk; Robert to the vicinity of Stewarton, as a cotman on the farm of Titwood, till a growing family compelled his removal to Stewarton,

where he died in 1789, and was buried in the churchyard there.

When the poet took refuge from the Armours in 1786, a half-sister of his mother resided at Old Rome Forest, married to a man named Allan, who held a responsible position on the Fairlie estate. The poet's reference to the "Fairlie lambs" in the suppressed stanza of *Poor Mailie*, betokens a familiarity begotten of youthful visits to his relatives at Fairlie, and justifies the surmise that William Burnes made the acquaintance of his wife, Agnes Brown, when employed there. One of the poet's Fairlie kinsmen took to a seafaring life, and became the founder of the Allan Line of steamers. The Browns came of the peasant stock of the West who suffered severely in the Killing Times of the Covenant, and could claim descent from the Lollards of Kyle—religious fanatics, it may be said, but none the less champions in their day of the rights of a free people. The Browns of Kirkoswald, judging from their tombstone in the churchyard, were peasants of some consequence and lengthy pedigree. Agnes, grand-daughter of John (*circa* 1650-1724), and daughter of Gilbert, successive tenants of the farm of Craiginton, became the mother of the poet and thereby immortalised the family. She

is described by her daughter, Mrs. Begg, as a woman of average height, with the clear complexion which usually accompanies auburn hair, dark eyed, of a lively temperament, and endowed with a never-failing fund of sound commonsense. Murdoch, the schoolmaster, tells us that she had a profound reverence for her husband, who was, he continues, "by far the best of the human race he had ever known."

In his autobiography, the poet describes his father as a man "of stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility"; so full withal of observation and experience of the world that he was beholden to him for most of his pretensions to wisdom. From which we may infer that William Burnes—swarthy of countenance, tall and spare in figure, with shoulders bent with hard labour—was a blunt, honest man, somewhat soured by his struggles with fortune. His word was his bond; a breach of faith an unpardonable sin resented with the whole force of his nature, be the offender laird or labourer. Ribaldry and indecency of speech this clean-minded peasant would have none of; he thought out his own religious opinions, as witness his *Manual of Religious Belief* which he drew up for the guidance of his children whom he regarded with an affection

as deep as it was unostentatious ; above all, he lived a blameless life. Agnes Brown was so meagre of education that she could not sign her own name, yet so strong in moral fibre that she broke with her first lover because of a moral lapse which she refused to condone. With such heads the Burnes household was well equipped for the rearing of good men and women. The sons and daughters born to them were intellectually superior to the average of the class to which they belonged ; and they took their meals with a spoon in one hand and a book in the other.

Little heed was then paid to the education of women, but every effort was made to give the sons as good an education as means and opportunities could supply. Gilbert Burns, overshadowed by his brother, was yet a man of exceptional mental gifts, sedulously cultivated under most unfavourable conditions. William, who died at an early age in London, has also left proof in his letters that he was a young man of much more than average ability. The poet's school career covered a period of three years all told, while Gilbert's was in all probability shorter. Both attended adventure or voluntary schools in Alloway—it was not a separate parish and had no school—successively under Campbell and

Murdoch, and thereafter the parish school of Dalrymple, week about, for a summer session; an additional three months, in the poet's case, being accomplished at Kirkoswald.[1] When he made his appearance in Edinburgh the titled and literary authorities were amazed at the extent and variety of his knowledge and the range of his acquirements. He was no unlettered peasant with a touch of poetic inspiration, as had been expected.[2] "He was more intimately acquainted with Pope, Shenstone, and Thomson (he might have added Ossian, Milton, Goldsmith, Cowper, and Gray) than three-fourths of the youths who leave our schools for the university," says Lord Jeffrey in his patronising way, adding "that he

[1] In 1735 twelve parishes in the Presbytery of Ayr had no school, and at so late a date as 1752 schools had not been provided in all the Ayrshire parishes.

[2] In his letter to Dr. Moore he gives a list of the books he had read, which included Guthrie and Salmon's *Geographical Grammar*, *The Spectator*, Pope's Works, some of Shakespeare's plays, Tull and Dickson on Agriculture, *The Pantheon*, Locke on *The Human Understanding*, Justice's *British Gardener*, Boyle's *Lectures*, Allan Ramsay's Works, Dr. Taylor *On Original Sin*, *A Collection of English Songs*, and Harvey's *Meditations*. He afterwards became acquainted with the poetry of Thomson, Shenstone, Beattie, Goldsmith, Gray, Fergusson, Spenser and Ossian; Adam Smith's *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, Bunyan's Works, Boston's *Fourfold State*, Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible*, *The Wealth of Nations*, *Tristram Shandy*, and Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*. He knew the Bible thoroughly, and calls it a "glorious book."

had about as much scholarship as Shakespeare." To the end of his life he retained the reading habit of his youth, as his correspondence with Mrs. Dunlop testifies.[1] At his death his library was an extensive one, volumes from which are continually turning up bearing witness in marginal comments that he had perused them to some purpose.[2] At Mt. Oliphant and Lochlea books were not read for amusement but solid instruction, eked out by sage explanations and scraps

[1] The following list of books is taken at random from the poet's correspondence with Mrs. Dunlop. They were read by both and discussed in the letters. Pope's *Homer*, Dryden's *Virgil*, Hoole's *Tasso*, Spenser's *Fairy Queen*, Virgil's *Georgics*, Cowper's *Poems*, Voltaire's *Maid of Orleans* (in the original), Blind Harry's *Wallace*, Barbour's *Bruce*, Moore's *Journal*, Moore's *Zeluco*, Alex. Wilson's *Poems*, Bourn's *Religious Works*, etc. Burns also read the *Spectator*, *Adventurer*, *Rambler*, *The World*, *The Mirror*, and *The Lounger*. His friend Cunningham presented him with Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, which he read carefully and annotated, as was his custom.

[2] In December, 1791, he paid an account for books, to Peter Hill, which amounted to £8 16s. 8d. The purchases were, *Letters on the Religion Essential to Man*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Count Fathom*, *Launcelot Greaves*, Family Bible (£2), Johnson's *English Dictionary*, Shakespeare's Works, Ossian's Poems, Smellie's *Philosophy of Natural History*, *The World*, Garrick's Works, Cibber's Works, *The Adventurer*, *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Roderick Random*, *The Scots Worthies*, *Marrow of Divinity*, Cole *on God's Sovereignty*, Newton's *Letters*, *Confession of Faith*, Boyle's Voyages, Blair's Sermons, Guthrie's Grammar, Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*, Price *on Providence and Prayer*, *Don Quixote*, *The Idler*, and "Ainslie's Map of Scotland" (£1 11s. 6d).

of information which the head of the household had contrived to store away in his mind in the spare moments of his laborious life.

Schoolmaster Murdoch, a most estimable member of a profession which Scotland has always praised loudly and paid miserably, on his return to Ayr, took the poet in hand again in his fourteenth year for a three weeks' course in English grammar and elementary French, with results which a College session rarely produces.[1] Burns never forgot the kindly offices of Murdoch, and it may be that his life-long partiality for schoolmasters was the outcome of grateful remembrance of what he owed to his early instructor. But he and the family owed more to their father, who indeed imparted to his daughters all the book learning they ever received. Two sons and two daughters, of a family of seven, were born in the mud-walled, straw-thatched cottage erected with his own hands on a plot of ground extending to 7 acres, 18 falls, which he had feued from a Dr. Campbell in Ayr, and named New Gardens. He had left Old Rome to become gardener to

[1] When in Edinburgh he took lessons from Louis Cauvin, teacher of French there, which extended over three months. He was fond of airing his French in his correspondence, and was able to read in the original with little aid from the dictionary.

Mr. Crawford, of Doonside, whose service he left in 1756 to try a market-gardening venture on this small holding, which he cultivated in what spare time he had at his disposal after attending to his duties as gardener to Provost William Fergusson, of Doonholm.

After some ten years of this exacting labour, his employer thought so well of his industry and skill that he offered him the tenancy of the farm of Mt. Oliphant, of which he was landlord, at what was considered a fair rent, Mr. Fergusson generously advancing £100 to stock the holding, for which sum Wm. Burnes granted as security a bond over New Gardens and the pertinents thereof. Accordingly, in 1766 he removed from the cottage in which his illustrious son was born on Jany. 25th, 1759. A few days after the Poet's birth the gable of the cottage fell in during a storm (so frail a structure was it that it was in a dilapidated condition in 1776, only twenty years after its erection) and the mother and child were carried to a neighbouring dwelling till the necessary repairs were executed. This incident is accountable for a tradition, which still persists to some extent, that the Poet was born in a cottage on the other side of the road leading through the clachan. There is no doubt whatever regarding the identity of the Cottage.

New Gardens and the Cottage were purchased from Wm. Burnes by the Incorporation of Shoemakers in Ayr, in 1781, from which date its history is contained in the minutes of that body down to its sale to the Monument Committee, exactly one hundred years later.

The early years of his married life in Alloway were perhaps the happiest in the hard lot of Wm. Burnes. At Mt. Oliphant the whole burden of work rested on his shoulders with occasional hired help in times of stress. This proved too much for a constitution enfeebled by advancing years and predisposed to consumption. Before the elder boys arrived at maturity they were doing the work of men to relieve their father. At the age of fifteen the Poet was ploughman and principal labourer, with Gilbert as second hand, the rest of the family contributing as best they could to the subsidiary work of the farm. But their efforts proved unavailing ; the niggard soil proved incapable of yielding a bare subsistence in addition to the cost of its hire. Disease and death amongst the live stock added to the embarrassments. This period of his life the Poet describes as " the cheerless gloom of a hermit with the unceasing moil of a galley slave," and it left an indelible impress on his sensitive soul. Its physical effects contributed in no small degree

to the causes of his early death.[1] The death of their considerate landlord brought matters to a crisis. His affairs were put into the hands of an agent who proceeded to administer the estate as is the wont of the "man of business" everywhere. Rent and interest on the loan were demanded as they fell due under threat of legal procedure if not punctually discharged. After a protracted period of incessant worry and discouragement, Wm. Burnes, in 1777, renounced his lease and entered on the tenancy of Lochlea, in the parish of Tarbolton, in the hope of bettering his prospects. How he stood financially at his outgoing from Mt. Oliphant may be roughly computed from what followed. The heirs of Mr. Fergusson foreclosed in 1781, and the Cottage and land were sold, as already stated, for £160, of which sum only five pounds were paid over to Wm. Burnes, the balance presumably being retained in payment of principal and accumulated interest.[2]

The "cheerless gloom" of Mt. Oliphant,

[1] Gilbert informs us that a tub of water was kept at the Poet's bedside, into which he plunged when threatened with fainting-fits in the night time. The "cold water cure" is mentioned by Mrs. Dunlop in letters of December 30th, 1792, and 16th March, 1793, as a familiar bed-room requisite when he visited at Dunlop House.

[2] In 1881 the cottage and pertinents were sold by the Incorporation of Shoemakers to the Monument Trustees, for £4000.

whose chilling influence had benumbed both body and soul for the greater part of ten years, was at length illumined, the poet tells us, by the "first dawnings of love and poetry." The inspiring goddess of, *O, once I loved a bonnie lass*, was his partner in the harvest field—Nellie Kilpatrick, the daughter of the village blacksmith, say some; others, of the miller in Perclewan in the immediate vicinity. This first attempt at song-writing was probably framed on the model of some street ballad, or it may have been an improvement on the verses of the innominate "laird's son" sung by his inamorata. Notwithstanding Burns's paternal critique of it in the *Commonplace Book*, it does not reach a much higher level than the average "poet's corner" effusion of love-sick swains in their teens. He himself describes it as "puerile and silly," yet it has a value of its own as his first essay at poetic expression of "the wild enthusiasm of passion" which even at that early age possessed him. If, as he leads us to believe, his next lyrical attempt was *Now Westlin Winds and Slaught'ring Guns*, which contains very few Scots words, his genius must have been maturing by leaps and bounds in the interval. He has left few traces of his rapid ascent to the super-excellence of *Corn Rigs*—rough drafted at Lochlea and polished at Mossgiel—in

honour of "Annie," though "Nannie," her contemporary, would have suited the rhyme just as well. The identity of the heroine (if she was anything but a name), being known only to himself, is perhaps the reason that his "wild enthusiasm" here comes nearer the *abandon* of passion than in any other of his love songs.

The heroine-hunters seemingly never tire of their quest, but Burns's heroines are elusive, and he himself renders them more so. The Kirkoswald "charmer" is supplanted by "Jean Armour" in the *Commonplace Book*; Chloris is dethroned more than once; Nannie and Mary are transferred from the Stinchar and Ayr to the Lugar and Afton as convenience demanded; Highland Mary he deliberately left an enigma; Robina is changed to Eliza without apology; Mary Morison is bequeathed to us as a Mauchline Mrs. Harris; in short, the local setting is utilised—often though not always—for movable figures in the foreground, some of which are so firmly limned that we cannot mistake them. We cannot distinguish with certainty between the early pieces composed at Mt. Oliphant and at Lochlea. Those which have been preserved mark a marvellously swift development of his powers, exercised for the most part on the men and manners he was brought in contact with. In the cart on the

highway, in his solitary walks, in the evening by the firelight, he conned over the contents of every Song Collection he could lay hands on, carefully noting excellencies and defects, thereby perfecting himself in his art, and storing his mind with that extensive and varied knowledge of the canticular literature of his native land which he afterwards put to such good use. Most of his early productions—*The Ruined Farmer; Ah! woe is me; Winter, a Dirge; A Prayer in the Prospect of Death*, and others—reveal a mental propensity which manifested itself all through the after years in strange outbursts of despondency bordering on hysteria in letters to favoured correspondents. These fitful shadows were the aftermath of the gloom of Mt. Oliphant, of whose malign influence we find few signs during the initial hopeful years at Lochlea. He now beheld the future illumined by "Dame Fortune's golden smile"; through his grey sky the blue was appearing; hope was awakened, and he stepped forth into the sunshine in the flower of youth, and revelled in the joy of living. Though fortune had frowned upon his humble birth, melancholy had not wholly marked him for her own. He polished his deportment at a country dancing-school; he attired himself as a rural dandy in a fillemot plaid, and wore the only tied

hair in the parish; he joined the Brotherhood of the Merry Masons; he founded a Bachelor's Club for grave discussions on the momentous questions dear to all young men's debating societies; and he took a hand in most of the local love affairs, either as principal or seconder, *vide The Tarbolton Lassies*, and the *Ronalds of Bennals*.

He poked fun rich and imperishable at the Tarbolton dominie turned apothecary; wrote facetious epigrams and epitaphs on prominent local worthies; pilloried some purse-proud "Tibbie" or other (said to be one of the Ronalds) in half a dozen stanzas of stinging sarcasm for giving him the cold shoulder; and made his first serious prose effort in a series of letters to "My Dear E.," every one of which is so unemotional and prosaic, so like a composition exercise on the Addisonian model, that we would have been inclined to deny their authenticity had rough drafts of the originals not been preserved. When he tells us that she was "a woman of an education much beyond anything he had ever met with," the restrained tone of the letters is accounted for. He had a remarkable facility in adapting both theme and style to the characteristic emotions or tastes of his correspondents, nowhere more observable than in his

epistles to "My Dear E." and "Clarinda" on the same subject. In both cases, he was showing off his parts; but in the earlier instance he was feeling his way in a double sense—to the affections of the young woman and the art of clothing his ideas in the fashionable English dress exemplified in the pages of the Collections of Letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign which he had so long and diligently studied. His epistolary wooing of this housekeeper at Coilsfield (her name in full was Elison Begbie) was unsuccessful, much to his chagrin. Her awkward surname did not lend itself to rhyme, for which reason she appears under various cognomens—Peggy Allison, Mary Morrison, Montgomerie's Peggy, and the Lass of Cessnock Banks—in songs composed about this date though not given to the public till he began to contribute to Johnson and Thomson.

Among the Tarbolton worthies whom he rescued from oblivion, perhaps the least known, and certainly the most amusing, is Saunders Tait, pedlar, tailor, and rhymster, to whose uncouth rhymes, it seems, he had devoted a few stanzas of criticism not in quite so complimentary a vein as those to David Sillars. Saunders took his revenge by embalming in coarse limping doggerel the floating gossip concerning the dispute between Wm. Burnes and his landlord, taking the part

of the latter as a stalking-horse for an attack on the Poet, in which appears this suggestive couplet,

> "I maun tell his pedigree,
> Because he made a sang on me."

David Sillars had also incurred the ire of the self-sufficient Saunders, from which we may infer that the "brither poets" were at one as to the merits of Saunders's productions,

> "My pipe wi' wind I maun gae fill 'er,
> And play a tune to Davie Sillar."

Saunders published a volume of his precious poetry (only one copy is known to survive),[1] at Paisley, in 1790—a date which renders it probable that Burns perused it. As a specimen of its own kind of literature, it is both curious and interesting, and would have been more entertaining had its malevolence been less apparent. This "sang" on Saunders Tait and probably more of the same kind have perished, because forgotten or deemed unworthy when the *Commonplace Book* of the Poet was begun.

It appears that the conditions of entry to Lochlea were so favourable to Wm. Burnes as to enable him to retain some ready money for improvements in the cultivation of the soil. From Tait's rhyming indictment we can make

[1] Preserved in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

out that the common report was that the landlord, David M'Clure, merchant in Ayr, stocked and furnished the farm under verbal stipulations which, like most bargainings of the kind, eventually led to litigation. The immediate cause of the rupture, according to tradition, was the repudiation by the landlord of a claim for compensation for improvements agreed upon apart from the lease. The case was referred to arbitration, and the finding went against Wm. Burnes, who was mercifully spared the distress of witnessing the sequestration of his estate which followed. He died at Lochlea on 13th February, 1784, not without a vague consciousness of the latent gifts of the extraordinary being who had been born to him, the occasional aberrant manifestations of which filled him with foreboding.

These early stirrings of his nascent powers undoubtedly took their colour from his surroundings, most of them being surcharged with a morbid pessimism truly remarkable in one entering on the morning of life. He brooded over the power of wealth, the impotence of poverty, the hard lot of the toiler contrasted with the self-indulgence and luxuries of the rich—object lessons from his own hard experience—till they permeated all his thought and became the dominant notes of his early poems. But intercourse with a

wider world modified the crude philosophy of his youth. *Man was made to Mourn* is confessedly a " partial view of human-kind " ; in his *Epistle to Davie* the moralising is on a higher plane, inasmuch as the sources of true happiness are declared to be no monopoly of the rich and great, but an acquisition within the reach of the humblest.

He has been called the poet of a parish. It is more in accordance with fact to say that he was the poet of some half dozen parishes and three royal burghs to boot, before his poems appeared in print. A parish is more or less an epitome of the greater world of which it forms a part ; and it was imperative that Burns should draw his inspiration from the men and things around him, to achieve the unique position posterity has accorded him as the most *national* of all poets, ancient or modern.

In Scottish literature Allan Ramsay forms the connecting link between the eighteenth century and the times of the older poets and nameless " Makaris," whose traditions he followed and strove to preserve. Ramsay left no successor, and thus it came to pass that Scottish poetry towards the end of that century had lost its individuality and given place to the mechanical versification of the Pope School, represented by

Thomson, Beattie, Young, Blair, and some lesser lights, who wrote English verse, the characteristics of which were pedantic affectation, mellifluent monotony and transparent unreality, relieved by many passages of true poetic beauty expressed in the approved correct form. Burns came to change all that. Poor Fergusson did much to rehabilitate the Scottish Muse during his short and tragic life, but infinitely more by quickening the ambition of his greater successor, and making plain his pathway to complete the task. Burns critically studied Fergusson's compositions, and in doing so found what he had hitherto lacked—an aim in life. Stirred by the possibilities revealed he applied himself to the work appointed for him to do, and henceforward, when he took the pen in hand, he put forth all his strength. He was bred to the plough, and that calling he regarded as the only way open to him of earning his living. When he entered on Mossgiel, the *Vision* bears witness to his earnest resolution to be henceforth "rhyme proof" and devote all his energies to the affairs of the farm. But resolutions, however sincere, could not stifle the promptings within him to pursue the "aim in life" of which as yet he was but dimly conscious.

Actuated by a firm conviction that he was fitted for better things, he attempted, when in

his seventeenth year, to escape from his life of drudgery. He went to Kirkoswald, where his mother's people resided, for a three months' course of elementary geometry under Dominie Rodgers, with what ulterior purpose we know not unless it were a vague expectancy that a wider range of knowledge would open a way for advancement in life. During his stay there, he saw more of the seamy side of life than in all the years under his father's roof. He witnessed the rough and riotous lives of the Ayrshire smugglers, to whose bold and levelling creed his sympathies responded; and in their company scenes of drunken revelry became familiar when a cargo was successfully run. But all the while he was taking notes, to be afterwards utilised in *Tam O' Shanter* and the characterisation of *Halloween*. He prosecuted his studies diligently, " till the sun entered Virgo, when a charming *fillette* next door to the school upset his trigonometry," and became the heroine of his second love song. " Handsome Nell " was dethroned, and a Kirkoswald " Prospero gathering flowers "—Peggy Thomson by name—reigned in her stead. His emotional nature revealed itself thus early as the veriest touchwood, so easily set aflame that a shrine must needs be set up wherever he went, not for the worship of an abstraction or a memory, but a

living, palpable, female presence. Under the spell of Virgo he forsook his text books, and dallied with this rural Prospero till the harvest called him home, "very considerably improved," he says in his autobiography, by his introduction to Euclid, and the poems of Shenstone and Thomson.

In his twenty-third year, he made another attempt to change the current of his life by a flax-dressing venture in the burgh of Irvine, where a relation of his mother, named Peacock, had a business of the kind. Flax was then grown, by special enactment, in considerable quantities throughout the country for domestic consumption, skilled workmen, called hecklers, being employed to convert it into "tow" for the spinning-wheel. There appears to have been some sort of co-partnery arranged with this person, whom Burns describes as "a scoundrel of the first water." The ill-assorted partnership could not have lasted long in any case, but an open rupture was avoided by an opportune fire, occasioned by the drunken carelessness of his partner's wife at a New Year carousal, which reduced the workshop to ashes and left the poet penniless. The project ended literally in smoke, and there was no alternative to returning to Lochlea where his father, in the last stages

of consumption, was nearing the end of his earthly pilgrimage.

Turning again to his autobiography we find that in Irvine "he learned something of a town life," and extended his reading by "two stray volumes of *Pamela*, and one of *Ferdinand Count Fathom*," besides adding *Tristram Shandy* and the *Man of Feeling* to his library. He here formed a close friendship with Richard Brown, a sea captain, whose personality he describes in extravagant terms of hero worship.[1] "His mind was," he says, "fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself when Woman was the presiding star. I loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and of course strove to imitate him." The import of this last sentence may be gauged by this farther addition to Brown's accomplishments,—"He spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto I had regarded

[1] He was also acquainted with several members of the deluded Buchanites, a religious sect founded by one of the most abandoned female impostors on the page of Scottish history. They were expelled from Irvine in May, 1784, and passed Mossgiel on their way to their promised land in Dumfriesshire. Burns gives a short account of them in a letter to one of his Montrose relatives, in which he does not refer to any of them by name. The evidence on which rests an oral tradition that one of them was an Irvine *fillette* of the Poet is not worth consideration.

with horror." As was to be expected, Brown, in after years, repudiated this, and retaliated by asserting that Burns had nothing to learn from him when he made his acquaintance. Be that as it may, Burns writes,—"His friendship did me a mischief, and the consequence was that soon after I assumed the plough, I wrote the *Welcome*." This was the poetic Welcome to his illegitimate daughter, "Dear Bought Bess," born on 22nd May, 1785, whose mother was Elizabeth Paton, of Largieside, servant in the household at Lochlea.[1] The Poet was then in his twenty-sixth year, to which point he had maintained an unblemished record. His douce brother, Gilbert, thus testifies of him. "As my brother's love connections were governed by the strictest rules of virtue and modesty, from which he never deviated till he reached his twenty-third year, he became anxious to be in a situation to marry. I do not recollect, during the seven years we were at Lochlea, nor till towards the end of his commencing author—when his growing celebrity occasioned his being often in

[1] By special agreement with his brother Gilbert, he made over to this child, when about to emigrate, all profits accruing from the copyright of the Kilmarnock edition. She also received a dowry of £200 from the posthumous fund raised by Sir James Shaw for behoof of the Poet's family. She became the wife of John Bishop, of Polkemmet, and died in 1816, leaving issue, a son and daughter.

company — to have ever seen him intoxicated; nor was he at all given to drinking."

His behaviour towards this child and her mother was characterised by the same manliness and repentant spirit which he exhibited on every occasion he was called upon to atone for his transgressions. But for his mother and sisters, who objected to her illiteracy and ungainly manners, he would have made amends by marrying this woman. As it was, "he satisfied the Church and got the child christened," paid a sum of money to the mother after the publication of the Kilmarnock volume, put the child under his mother's care, and paid for her board and education up to the last day of his life.[1] Through the whole tale of his follies and errors runs this golden vein of repentance and retribution, which, while it may evoke sympathy and palliate judgment, cannot be deemed justification sufficient for the implied plea, expressed in the verses to David Sillar, that mere goodness of heart is atonement sufficient for all sins and shortcomings. The *Epistle to John Rankin* and *The Rantin' Dog* which were composed at the same time as the *Welcome* have been characterised as

[1] Agreement between Robert Burns and Elizabeth Paton, dated 1st December, 1786. Also "Documents bearing on Gilbert's Debt to the Poet."—*Burns Chronicle*, No. IX., 1900.

a kind of moral bravado, a flaunting of his sins before the eyes of the world in a spirit of reckless defiance. This is a narrow and cold-blooded view of Burns's repentant moods, whose "mock heroics," says his brother Gilbert, were caricatures of his real feelings which he never supposed could be taken literally. The glowing tenderness which pervades the *Welcome* neutralises much that at first sight seems offensive; and what looks like deadened sensibility in the *Trimming Epistle*, and in that addressed to Rankine, is really the expression in broad caricature of the general contempt entertained for the Holy Willies, Godly Bryans, and the rest of the unconvicted transgressors who so smugly sat in judgment on him in name of Holy Church.

It is a feature of human nature to anticipate judgment on our errors by referring to them with an assumed levity akin to the smile of the Indian under torture and really the thinnest camouflage to conceal our real feelings. He could sin but he could not lie. Nor did he ever make the slightest attempt to justify, palliate, or excuse his offences; on the contrary, his self-condemnation is as merciless as his worst enemy could desire. Is it not, then, this stark-naked honesty which has been mistaken by the unsympathetic for symptoms of a deadened or deflected con-

science? He was charitable to a fault when judging the conduct of "his brother man and sister woman"; his emotional nature was always at white heat, moving him to indignation at the sight of the wounded hare and to regretful sorrow over the distrust of the water-fowl of Loch Turit. No living thing but himself ever suffered from his misdeeds if he could prevent it;[1] pity welled up in his heart for the pariahs of the brute creation and the outcasts of humanity; nay, he has even a word of compassion for the devil himself. "God knows," he writes to Mrs. Dunlop, "I am no saint; I have a whole host of sins and follies to answer for; but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes." Against the pieces we have mentioned should be set his *Epitaph*, *The Lament*, the *Ode to Despondency*, and the reflections in his *Commonplace Book*, all composed about the same date, and inspired by the self-same experiences.

Among the first fruits of his awakened ambition were *Poor Mailie* and *John Barleycorn*, whose excellence and originality lose nothing by the

[1] Isabella Begg, Burns's niece, writing to Robert Chambers in 1850, regarding the family knowledge of Highland Mary, says: "Though great were his errors, yet he never, Adam-like, cast the blame on his partner, but strove to defend them, and take all the blame upon himself."

pointless criticism that they are new sermons from old texts. Richard Brown, whatever else may be said of him, had the acumen to perceive the poetic genius of Burns, and it is perhaps to his appreciation and encouragement that we owe the marvellous output of poetry during the two years which followed at Lochlea and Mossgiel. He now began to be known as a maker of rhymes; and it also began to be noised abroad that he was a scoffer, and mocker of the good old God imported from Geneva. He had used his tongue freely in the Bachelor's Club and in the churchyard between sermons. He had assailed superstition and shocked deep-seated prejudice, troubled the stagnant waters of bucolic thought, and roughly handled some of the chief rulers in the synagogue. Copies of his MSS. were read to tatters by grinning rustics, but with small exception the rank and file of the "town's-bodies," lethargic and impatient of disturbers of the peace, shook their wise heads and boded little good of him.

When affairs were finally settled at Lochlea, what was saved from the wreck was pooled as joint capital for the stocking of Mossgiel—a sublet from Gavin Hamilton, writer, Mauchline, his life-long, firmest, and most faithful friend. Thither he removed early in

1784, with the firm resolve, as we have said, to devote all his energies to the business of farming. But the Fates were silently working out their inexorable decrees. The Mossgiel venture was soon seen to be foredoomed to failure, and he, by sheer stress of circumstances, set himself methodically to put into shape the "formless jumble floating in his brain" which hitherto he had done only by fits and starts. The unfortunate train of events which speedily followed transformed the day dream of his *Commonplace Book* into reality, and accelerated the working out of his new resolution. Driving the plough, sowing and reaping, afield and at home, morning, noon, and night, he hammered out his art in his inner consciousness till he attained perfection, confiding the marvellous results to the copy-book in his attic bedroom—an object of keenest curiosity to his sister every time he stole up to add another contribution to the ever-growing list, as "Coila" had counselled him. And the result was that at Mossgiel the local poet dislimned, the great heart of humanity responded, and the boundaries of the parish were extended to the utmost ends of the earth.

CHAPTER II

MAUCHLINE AND MOSSGIEL

The farm of Mossgiel turned out as financially disappointing as Mt. Oliphant and Lochlea. From this continuous record of failure, it has been asserted that the Burnses were either careless or incompetent farmers, but that is arbitrary judgment. Insufficient capital limited their choice to the poorest soils, and likewise precluded effective measures for their improvement. At the manual operations of the farm, the Poet had no rival; and Mrs. Dunlop complimented him on the practical skill demonstrated by the first year's crops at Ellisland which were the heaviest ever produced there.[1] The failure at Ellisland resulted partly from the poverty of the soil but in greater measure from the impossibility of conducting a farm and discharging the duties of an exciseman which entailed a ride of 200 miles

[1] Colonel Fullarton, of Fullarton, in his *Agricultural Survey of the County of Ayr*, mentions Burns in terms of high commendation as an advocate for a more merciful method of dishorning cattle than was then the custom.

every week. Gilbert struggled on in Mossgiel till 1796 with the aid of borrowed money from his brother which only postponed final disaster.[1]

To the Poet's other recommendations for the matrimonial market was added the well-founded report that he was a penniless farmer on the verge of bankruptcy. Had Mossgiel been ten times the distance from the village of Mauchline that it really was the whole complexion of his after life might have been different. To a man of his mental organisation a community of fellow mortals within a quarter of an hour's walk from his dwelling was an attraction as irresistible as the action of the law of gravity. Every hour he could spare was spent in the village, sometimes in grave converse with Gavin Hamilton or Dr. Mackenzie; oftener in merry mood with John Richmond, Merchant Smith, and Tanner Hunter, scrutinising the latest gossip with the search-light of humour.

What a cosmorama in miniature of the Mauchline of that day has come down to us! The informed reader will be able to trace the

[1] The Poet lent him £180 out of the profits of the Edinburgh edition, which sum was not fully repaid till 1820. The annual interest was paid mostly in kind—cheese, meal etc.—as Jean required these commodities. In December, 1820, the balance against Gilbert was £220 7s. 6d., which he paid and was finally discharged.

connection between most of the local happenings and the Kirk Session which, like a huge octopus, held the whole community in the grasp of its far-reaching tentacles. How far-reaching may be gauged by reliable figures. In 1791, the village contained 1000 inhabitants, and the landward part of the parish, 800; about the same date, the membership of Mr. Auld's congregation numbered 1400, consequently the whole parish was practically under the sway of the Kirk Session. The *dramatis personae* were a motley crew, composed of representative types of the population,—Daddie Auld, High Priest of the "unco guid," dispensing the pains and penalties of Kirk Law, much perturbed in mind at the never-ending queue of cutty-stool culprits and the alarming spread of doctrinal Bolshevism, notwithstanding his flagellations; Gavin Hamilton, type of the "guid" without the "unco," in the dock for contempt of Kirk and raising contraband potatoes on Sunday; Dr. Mackenzie, shrewd, full of wise counsels and kindly impulses, and gifted with golden silence; Fisher the "Holy," and Bryan the "Godly," official gamekeepers given to poaching on their own account; "Clockie Brown" ("Johannes Fuscus" of *Lament him Mauchline husbands a'*) and Sandie Doo (son of "Johnie Pigeon"), night poachers,

in league with Jeanie Mitchell and Maggie Borland; tobacconist Ronald, village Pasha, the longest-eared ass who ever posed as a critic of poetry; erstwhile "Mason Wull," now "Merchant Mister Miller," suffering from *inflatio capitis* since his marriage to Nansie Bell's "Jamaica siller"; James Armour, a mason "bodie," type of "kirkgaun" respectability, fond of "a pickle snuff and a bit dram occasionally"; pawkie Nance Tinnock and godless "Johnie Pigeon," dispensers of "tuppenny" and usquebae; "Black Geordie" and "Poosie Nancy," host and hostess of the beggars' "doss house"; "Racer Jess," Jock, and "Haveril Jean," their thorough-bred offspring; their handmaiden ("Geordie's Jirr"), lynched for misdemeanour by Adam Armour and the hobbledehoys of the village; Bet Barbour of the Racer Jess sisterhood; Laird M'Gaun *alias* "Master Tootie," a "loopie body," type of unprincipled close-fisted greed; Jamie Humphrey, a "bletherin' bodie," type of garrulous old women of the male sex; "Wee Johnie," a nondescript "bodie," type of purple-top vegetable humanity; Queen Netherplace, a skinflint and a shrew; Souter Hood, the man with the muck rake; the mock tribunal on public morals, presided over by the Rebel Four.[1]

[1] Burns, Richmond, Smith, and Hunter.

which held its sederunts in the "Whiteford Arms"; and, last but not least, the "proper young belles"—half a dozen named, and the rest, including Highland Mary, left nameless.

This selection, for which Burns himself is responsible, may be taken as a fair sample of Mauchline society as it then existed. Like most villages in that era the educated average did not reach a high percentage; it therefore followed as a natural consequence that Burns's "wild logical talent and bookish knowledge" made him the most conspicuous man in the place.[1] He told Dr. Moore that he was "a welcome guest where he visited," which means nothing more than that he was appreciated by the broader-minded who were a small minority. The "steady, sturdy, staunch believers" in the kirk's infallibility looked upon him with suspicion and aversion, for ignorance ever dreads what it does not understand. The Burgher dissent, which was then making serious inroads on the Kirk in Ayrshire, was even more orthodox than the Kirk itself, and therefore doubly deserving of

[1] A Debating Society was founded as at Tarbolton, the minutes of which were published in an Ayrshire newspaper some years ago. Though Gilbert Burns and David Sillar were prominent members, the Poet's name does not appear in any of the minutes. Before its inaugural meeting he had gone to Edinburgh.

scourging.[1] His was the proverbial fate of the square man in the round hole; the reputation he made amongst the bigoted orthodox was consequently among the things fore-ordained. He never took pains to remove unfavourable impressions, which his fearless honesty and detestation of all duplicity served but to deepen and confirm. He wore his heart upon his sleeve and gave the daws ample opportunity to work their will. In slang phraseology, he had an inveterate habit of "giving himself away" gratuitously, the result being that he is generally the principal, frequently the only, witness against himself. Akin to the self-immolation which accompanied his confessional moods is the "half-joke, whole-earnest" tone he adopts when speaking of his besetting sins.

In his Autobiography he makes this confession,—"Far beyond all other impulses of my heart was *un penchant à l'adorable moitié du genre humain*; my heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other." Elsewhere he writes,—

[1] The only notice he takes of the Burghers, so far as we are aware, is in a letter to Margaret Chalmers (October 1787) where he refers to "the preaching cant of old Father Smeaton, Whig minister at Kilmaurs." Their first meeting-house was erected in Kilmaurs, but Smeaton's diocese comprised the greater part of Cunninghame.

"Woman is the blood-royal of life; let them be all sacred. Whether this last sentiment be right or wrong, I am not accountable; it is an original component feature of my mind.[1]" This mental attitude towards all women was to him the heel of Achilles. But it was three-fourths of his inspiration. Had it been otherwise, had his emotional and intellectual faculties been more equally balanced, his lyrics would have lacked the passion which has made them and him immortal. In this connection, Mr. Henley, a merciless critic of the mortal part of him, says,—"Burns was not more multifarious in his loves than most others in whom the primordial instinct is of peculiar strength." This looks like a free paraphrase of a stanza in the Poet's *Prayer in the Prospect of Death*. If Mr. Henley felt compelled by the method he adopted to lay his subject on the dissecting table, his purpose would have been served had he left it at that. It is an easy task, says George Eliot, to write severe things about the transgressions of men of genius by "making ourselves over-zealous agents of Heaven and demanding that our brother should bring usurious interest for his Five Talents, forgetting that it is less easy to manage five talents than two."

[1] Letter to Miss Davis—the *Bonnie Wee Thing*—August, 1791.

The life story of any man, faithfully told, is not a Newgate Calendar of sins and follies committed in the flesh. The biographer who thinks otherwise and makes a cock-shy of his subject for the purpose of hurling opprobrious epithets in its direction has his counterpart in the artist who has convinced himself that the silhouette is the one and only true method of delineating the features of a white man. The pure-minded Wordsworth truly and charitably summed up this aspect of Burns when he wrote that he failed to control "the propensities which his sensibilities engendered." If damaging facts cannot be removed by explanations or excuses, neither can they acquire more cogency by exhibition in the lime-light of censorious criticism. Burns has saved the fault-finders the trouble of going far afield for their material. He is himself responsible for the reckless admissions in his *Epistle to Rankin*, *Rantin Rovin' Robin*, *Willie Brewed*, and others more candid in many of his letters. These lie convenient to hand as foundations for sweeping charges; and they are also primarily responsible for the widespread impression that along with his great gifts and loveable qualities he inherited a double measure of the weaknesses of fallen humanity. In fact, the worser side of Burns has been so often exhibited

under the microscope that the magnified dimensions have been taken at their face value by the ordinary reader who has not the opportunity nor perhaps the inclination to test their fidelity to fact.

Within recent years a considerable amount of evidence has been unearthed, which, either by document or conflicting fact, discredits some, and materially qualifies other, passages of the early biographers which have been faithfully echoed by their successors, copying being an easier task than original investigation. These bear principally on Burns's relations with Jean Armour and Highland Mary; the popular belief that he was neglected by his contemporaries and lived a life of poverty and misery; his social habits in Dumfries; the causes of his early death; the ribald literature foisted on his name; and his alleged bankruptcy in literary power and reputation in the closing years of his life. These questions we propose to deal with as they emerge from the narrative by correcting, so far as we are able, errors and misrepresentations which have found a place on the record, and submitting whatever additional evidence we may find at our command.

With the onerous task of verse-making at Mossgiel alternating with the labours of the

farm, it might have been thought that he had more than enough on his hands; nevertheless he contrived to find opportunity for song inspiration by the characteristic method of "putting himself on the regimen of admiring a fine woman." In the bevy of "belles" in the village he had a convenient field of operation, but the maladroitness with which he set to work by announcing himself a "rakish rook," and warning them against his sinister "finesse" and "politesse," is proof convincing that his was not the requisite mental armament of a Don Juan. Further, by his persistent self-accusing habit, his spontaneous, self-immolating efforts to make amends for his transgressions, and the upbraidings of his conscience when he failed to follow out the dictates of his better self, he shows himself the antithesis of Byron's heartless libertine. Truly he was "multifarious in his loves" judged by the standard usually applied to him—that every love-song he wrote should count in the indictment. But by the test applied to ordinary mortals the charge-sheet is by no means of such formidable dimensions as his censors would make it appear. The telltale, *From Thee, Eliza* (of which Betty Miller, one of the "belles," is the heroine), conveys the broadest of hints that his attentions were not confined to Miss Armour, though she

heads the list of his favourites. It is also true that she had another rival—a servant maid in Gavin Hamilton's house—too humble in station to be mentioned in the same breath with the "Lon'on and Paris" bedecked beauties of Mauchline; but of her more anon. When all this is conceded it falls immeasurably short of justification of the strictures which have been passed upon his conduct at this period of his life. There is nothing either exceptional or blameworthy in a young man philandering with two or three maidens in the same village up to a certain point; sooner or later his choice is bound to be made deliberately or by force of circumstances; and that is precisely what happened in Burns's case in the early Spring of 1786.

The beginnings of his acquaintance with Jean Armour—the village dance and the badinage on the public green—have been described often enough to excuse repetition here. It is sufficient to say that Jean so outdistanced all her rivals by the end of 1785 that she had become the selected "jewel" of Rob Mossgiel. What followed is the old, old story. When the truth became known, Burns did everything within the power of an honourable man to repair the wrong. Without hesitation he immediately married Miss Armour privately and offered to resign his interest

in Mossgiel and work as a common labourer to support his wife and family; alternatively, to emigrate and provide a home for them abroad. These proposals were rejected by the Armours with scorn. Jean's father, who by the way was a building contractor with a good local connection, was beside himself with rage and mortification when he was made aware of the condition of his daughter. The marriage was what is called "irregular," *i.e.* not in accordance with the regulations of the Church; but it was as binding in Scots law as though it had been solemnized by the decreed sacerdotal ceremony.

The local tradition—substantially confirmed by Burns himself—is, that the marriage took place in Gavin Hamilton's house in presence of a Justice of Peace who imposed a fine for breach of the regulations.[1] A legal document (popularly known as "marriage lines") was drawn up, duly signed and witnessed, and delivered into the keeping of Jean as voucher for her marital rights from that date onward.[2] This document was either mutilated or destroyed at the instigation

[1] Letter to James Smith (recently discovered), 26th June, 1788. (See Appendix D.)

[2] This declaration was probably written by Gavin Hamilton who was Burns's legal adviser in all business affairs. James Smith was one of the witnesses; the identification of the other lies between Gavin Hamilton and one or other of the local Justices.

of her father, she thereby becoming a consenting party to what Burns evidently considered at that time to be tantamount to a divorce. Jean was packed off to Paisley to be out of his reach, and when he called to enquire for her on her return, her mother peremptorily forbade him the house.[1] Hence his indignation and bitter resentment, which the servile attitude of the Armours towards him, on his change of fortune, transformed into a feeling bordering on contempt.

All authorities are agreed that a marriage ceremony took place early in 1786, but as the "lines" were destroyed, the exact date, which, strange to say, is not mentioned either in the Marriage Register or Session Records, cannot now be recovered. All that is recorded in the Marriage Register for 1788 is,—"they (Burns and Jean) acknowledged they were irregularly married *some time ago*"—a vague expression which we consider would not have been used had the marriage taken place in that year or even the previous one. Certain it is, however, that it took place before the beginning of April, 1786. The exact date is of less consequence than the strange blundering of the biographers when

[1] Letter to John Richmond, 9th July, 1786; to the same, 30th July, 1786, and to David Brice, 17th July, 1786. (See Appendix E.)

dealing with the ceremony itself. Lockhart asserts that Burns went through a marriage ceremony with his wife on two separate occasions; while Professor Nichol improves upon this curious form of bigamy by changing it into trigamy. The confusion has arisen partly from certain loose expressions by Burns himself when referring to his marriage, and partly from his equivocal treatment of Jean on his triumphant return from Edinburgh.

The matter becomes more puzzling when the action of the Kirk Session is taken into account. By destroying the written proofs, the Armours vainly hoped to annul the marriage; and Burns, after the treatment he had received at their hands, had no objection to lend himself to their action by passive acquiescence. He and his confidants therefore deliberately preserved a discreet silence, which took the point off whatever gossip may have gained currency.[1] Burns believed the Armours, provoked by the transfer of all he possessed to "Dear Bought Bess," meditated an action for expenses against him,

[1] From minutes of Kirk Session (2nd and 9th April, 1786) we learn that Mary Smith, the mother of Jean, denied any knowledge of her daughter's condition as reported to the Kirk Session. Holy Willie was one of the deputies sent to ferret out the matter, but it was not till 18th June that Jean made confession to the Session, and on the 25th Burns acknowledged paternity.

but the threat, if ever made, was not carried into effect. He informed his friends, Richmond and Brice, that Mr. Auld was willing to give him a clearance certificate as a *single man* if he complied with the rules of the Church; and that it was for that very reason he had resolved to submit himself to censure. And thus it came about that Burns, a married man, and Jean Armour, a wedded wife, were publicly rebuked in Mauchline Church for the birth of twins in lawful wedlock. Did Mr. Auld lend himself to this passive deception? Dr. Edgar, who had convenient access to all the Mauchline records, does not hesitate to say that "he was too upright a man to do anything of the sort; he must have believed that Burns was not married." We are shut up to this conclusion unless we are prepared to believe that Mr. Auld was an unprincipled man, utterly unworthy to hold the position of parish minister of Mauchline.[1] When the real state of matters was revealed to him in 1788, he made amends for his error of ignorance by

[1] Mr. Henley hazards the guess that Mr. Auld had a strong objection to the marriage; to which he appends the opinion that Auld was guilty of an illegal act in certifying Burns a bachelor; yet, further on, in deference to Lockhart, we presume, he states that Burns had so great an affection for Jean that he married her "twice over"—an absurdity on the face of it. There was no reason for the secrecy of another irregular marriage in 1788.

confining the charge to the irregular marriage, thereby furnishing irrefutable proof that all Jean Armour's children were born in wedlock. "I am inclined to believe," says Dr. Edgar, "pending further information, that, on some consideration or other, Mr. Auld had, prior to July, 1788, been led to believe that the twins of March 3rd had been born in lawful wedlock." [1]

How Burns received the tidings of Jean's breach of faith may be gathered from his letters of that date, the garbling and misplacing of which by the biographers do not strengthen, to say the least of it, his position as the aggrieved party. For instance, the letter in which he swears with an imprecation that he will never own Jean "conjugally," which must have been written subsequent to the irregular marriage, Lockhart quotes as if it had preceded that event. Another, hitherto printed as addressed to John Ballantyne but in reality to Gavin Hamilton, contains a vehement denunciation of Jean's "damnable conduct," which has been omitted in the garbled Ballantyne version. It concludes with these

[1] Burns's regrettable letter to Ainslie (3rd March, 1788) effectually disposes of Lockhart's alleged second marriage as an impossibility. Granting that it did take place, the birth of the twins would still have been an ante-nuptial offence for which Mr. Auld was bound to reprove them. There could have been no difficulty in producing the "marriage lines" of any second or third irregular ceremony.

words,—" Do not despise me, Sir ; I am indeed a fool, but a knave is an infinitely worse character than any one, I hope, will dare to give me." [1] Some writers have made great play over his ardent manifestations of regard for Jean after his exchange of vows with Highland Mary. Why should it be set down to his discredit that he retained a lingering affection for a woman whom he describes, in that extraordinary serio-comic letter of his to Arnot (April, 1786), as a " *wife* " now lost to him through her own perfidy, as he believed.[2] To account for the jugglings of the male human heart, in any set of circumstances, is a task beyond our powers, and we do not mean to try. He weathered the storm in the shades of Old Rome Forest, and went to Edinburgh with the bachelor certificate in his pocket, though ever haunted with the gravest doubts of its trustworthiness. He was received there as a single man, which doubtless would have the effect of unsettling his mind on the validity of his marriage ; he discovered his power of impressing women on a much higher social and

[1] We have seen the original, which is still in the possession of the Hamilton family. See Appendix.

[2] This is the only letter he ever wrote to Arnot whom he admired, but who was not an intimate friend, so far as the record shows. A transcript of it appears in the Glenriddel MSS., with an explanatory note.

intellectual level than the belles of Mauchline; and latterly he came under the fascination of Clarinda, when the wish became father to the thought, and he wrote two of the most regrettable letters that ever proceeded from his pen.[1] The remembrance of his treatment by the Armours rankled; new ambitions were awakened; the change in his outlook on life, plainly observable in 1787, reached a climax in the early months of 1788; but he came right in the end as Burns always did. Confronted with the heart-rending circumstances under which Jean had been banished from her father's house and for which her parents were primarily responsible, the native qualities of his mind, after a brief struggle between honour and wounded pride, resumed their wonted sway.

There was but one honourable course open to him, and he manfully accepted it. He confessed his irregular marriage to Mr. Auld, wrote his friend Smith, who was one of the witnesses, to forward his testimony by post,[2] and took up house in Mauchline to provide the element of *coitus* or cohabitation, which, in the eye of the law, was accounted the con-

[1] To Clarinda, 23rd February, 1788, and Robert Ainslie, 3rd March, 1788. (See Appendix F.)

[2] This letter (26th June, 1788) contains the "further information" desired by Dr. Edgar.

summation of all irregular marriages. This done, the indictment shrank to violation of the marriage regulations of the Church, for which both were reproved (August 5th, 1788), and taken bound to adhere to each other as man and wife.[1] Had Jean been thrust out of her father's house in 1786, Burns assuredly would have acted then as he did in 1788.

Before passing judgment on his vacillating conduct in the latter year, it ought to be kept in view that he was strongly influenced by the consciousness that he was still in the self-woven meshes of the Clarinda entanglement, from which it took him some time to cut himself clear. The spell was broken towards the end of March, when the crooked was made straight and the rough places of the path of duty made plain.[2] Nor must it be over-

[1] They had already done penance for the ante-nuptial lapse of 1786.

[2] On 4th June, 1788, Mrs. Dunlop wrote: "I am told in a letter that you have been a month married"; and proceeds to complain that he had never given her a hint of such an important event in his life." In his reply he confessed he was a husband. "I found a once much-loved and still much-loved female literally and truly cast out to the mercy of the naked elements, but as I enabled her to *purchase a shelter*, and there is no sporting with a fellow-creature's happiness or misery.... etc." On 10th August of the same year he writes Mrs. Dunlop again in more detail,—"As I was at that time laid up a cripple in Edinburgh, she was turned, literally turned, out of doors, and I wrote to a friend to shelter her till my return, *when our marriage was declared.*"

looked that underneath the whole tangled story lies the leavening consideration that had Jean remained faithful to her vows of 1786 and clung to her husband at all hazards, the current of his life in the years which immediately followed would have run in a less devious channel. This much we feel justified in saying—it is a great deal in view of some recent biographies—there would have been no Highland Mary and no Clarinda to point the barbs of unkindly and half-read critics. On the other hand, the world would have been deprived of the deathless lyrics which these experiences called forth. The facts carry their own conviction and justify the verdict that, though guilty of "high imprudence and egregious folly" (to quote his own words) Burns, throughout the whole bitter experience, showed a spirit of contrition, manly feeling, and forbearance under provocation which few could have emulated with less retaliation; and he accepted the position thrust upon him only when every other expedient had failed.[1]

[1] R. L. Stevenson, in *Some Aspects of Robert Burns*, ventilates peculiar and extraordinary views on Burns's marriage with Jean Armour. These are based on two assumptions—first, that Jean Armour's affections, from the first, were engaged by another man; and second, that Burns neither loved nor respected his wife. Neither is supported by the slightest shadow of evidence. Wilson, the weaver, was merely a friend of the Armour family; and it is preposterous to suppose Jean went to Paisley, in the

Inseparably connected with his breach with the Armours is what has been called the "Mysterious Episode" of Highland Mary, which occurred when the Poet was in his twenty-eighth year. It may be interesting to trace how the mystery originated and developed from somewhat prosaic facts obscured by a hazy atmosphere of romance in which the lapse of time and Burns's chronological euphemisms had placed them. The early biographers say little or nothing about her. Heron neither mentions her nor alludes to her; Currie adds nothing to what he found written concerning her by Burns, save that "she died early in life"; Cromek follows Currie's example; Hamilton Paul confines himself to the diffuse statement that Burns's first and last meetings with her took place at the confluence of the Ayr and Fail—"there or thereabout," he savingly adds. All the information we get from Gilbert Burns is his opinion that she was the heroine of *Sweet Afton*. Lockhart, who was the first to publish the inscriptions on

condition she then was, to resume an interrupted courtship with him or any one else. As for equality of mental powers and similarity of tastes, no man of genius, for that matter of it, was ever properly mated. R. L. S. is said to have been influenced by the sketchy *Life of the Poet* written by Sir Harris Nicolas for the first Aldine edition. This sketch is an extraordinary jumble of distorted facts and incoherent conclusions, betraying an amazing ignorance of the subject, inexcusable in the year 1830.

the Bibles, failed to take note that they were written at Mossgiel; and he gets rid of Highland Mary by transferring her to an unspecified date anterior "to his more serious efforts in poetry," thereby following the lead of Cromek when he should have led himself. Sir Harris Nicolas copied from Cromek and Lockhart; even Robert Chambers and Professor Wilson reproduced the error down to its correction by Mr. Scott Douglas in 1850. Burns makes no mention of her in the Moore Autobiography; there is no reference to her in his letters to his intimate friends except in the emotional terms he used on one occasion to Mrs. Dunlop. To the household at Mossgiel he vouchsafed no information regarding her, though his mother and sisters had some knowledge of her as a servant-maid in the locality. He does not even once mention her full name, and he persistently speaks of the "Episode" as occurring in "his early years," or "youthful days." The notes to that effect which he appended to *My Highland Lassie*, *Will ye go to the Indies*, *Highland Mary*, and *Mary in Heaven* we take to be the soil in which the mystery took root and grew.

The darkness deepened when enquiries were set on foot to discover her identity, which resulted in only a few meagre particulars.

Nothing else could have been expected in the case of a servant girl who came to Mauchline—whence nobody knew or cared; who remained there for a period measured by months; then departed—few knew or cared whither. During the intervening hundred and thirty odd years quite a mass of literature has gathered round her name, in whose mazes of fact, fiction, pathos, and bathos one is apt to lose his bearings. Why did Burns endeavour to veil this incident of his life? His reasons, to our thinking, are obvious. His irregular marriage took place early in the spring of 1786—before the end of February so far as can be made out—and his parting with Mary Campbell took place on Sunday, 14th May following, at which date he vainly imagined, on the strength of the promised Kirk Session certificate, that he was a single man.

He did not of set purpose mislead her; the record of Burns contains nothing that savours of falsehood or deceit, especially in his dealings with women. The "Episode" was a constant reminder of his ill-treatment by the Armours as well as an awkward interlude in his married life, for married he certainly was before May, 1786. Mary Campbell died without explanation or intimation of the sudden change in his fortunes, and this

weighed heavily on his mind as the lyrics to her memory testify. These discomposing memories sufficiently account for his desire to shroud in affected forgetfulness the erratic and conflicting impulses of the "maddening passions" roused into action in 1786, by a keen sense of injustice. All his references to the "Episode" are retrospective, ranging from three to seven years after the event—an interval of time which aided his deliberate design to throw it back to a date anterior to the events which happened in Mauchline.

For the reasons indicated, the authentic facts of Mary Campbell's life are few and far between; but her family has been traced, and from this source some additional particulars have been gleaned. She was born in the parish of Dunoon, the eldest of eight children born to her parents, who were married in 1762. Her father was a hand on board a revenue cutter plying on the west coast, in which service he lost an eye and was pensioned off;[1] it is therefore quite probable that the family resided at Campbeltown and Ardrossan at different dates. Before her appear-

[1] This on the authority of Mr. James Macfadzean (formerly mentioned), who was at one time Supervisor of the Kilmarnock District, and latterly of the Glasgow District—a highly respected officer and fervid Burns enthusiast. He died at Ayr in 1902. Campbell may have begun life as a crofter.

ance in Ayrshire, she seems to have resided for a time with some relations at Lochranza, Arran. Her movements after she came to the mainland are uncertain till she took service in Gavin Hamilton's household, which, there is every reason to believe, was in the year 1785. Unless there has been a lying conspiracy from the beginning, she undoubtedly acted in the capacity of a servant there, and also at Coilsfield (Montgomerie Castle) during her short sojourn in Ayrshire—whether as "nursemaid" in the one and "dairymaid" in the other is immaterial. Her name does not appear in the list of Gavin Hamilton's "present" servants cited by the Kirk Session (20th January, 1786) as witnesses in the prosecution of that worthy man for sabbath breaking, etc.; nor is it found amongst his "late" servants for at least eighteen months previous to that date.

The disputes between the Session and Mr. Hamilton began as far back as 1777, the inference being that she was not cited because she had no testimony to offer concerning events which happened before her period of service began. According to Burns himself, the "Episode" occurred "when he was thinking of going to the West Indies," and we know he had no such intention in 1783 or 1784. Mrs. Begg,

sister of the poet, assured Robert Chambers, on the authority of her mother, that "it was about the date of his desertion by Jean Armour that Mary Campbell was acting as nursemaid in the Hamilton household, which situation she left to become dairymaid at Coilsfield." John Blane, gaudsman at Mossgiel and servant to Gavin Hamilton when she was employed there, testifies that Burns had occasional interviews with her in the Castle adjoining Mr. Hamilton's residence. Mrs. Todd, daughter of Mr. Hamilton, remembered her as nursemaid to her brother, Alexander, who was born in July, 1785. Burns took up residence at Mossgiel in March, 1784, the old name of which was "Mossgavil," which he uses in a letter of that year to Thomas Orr. In 1786, he invariably writes "Mossgiel," with the solitary exception of his rhyming epistle to Gavin Hamilton on "Master Tootie," where it is spelt "Mossgaville" (3rd May, 1786). The farm-name in the almost obliterated inscription on the Bibles, when carefully scrutinized, has evidently been spelt in the same way—a remarkable coincidence[1] in two exceptions occurring in the same month. The publisher's date on the Bibles is 1782. All the songs in honour

[1] See *facsimile* of the inscription—Scott Douglas's Edinburgh edition, vol. i. p. 298.

of Mary Campbell bear internal evidence that they were composed when he was meditating emigration, *i.e.* between the Spring and Autumn of 1786. According to Mrs. Begg, he made her acquaintance previous to his "love fit" when Jean Armour deserted him. She was then presumably at Coilsfield, and we have already shown that the friendship or warmer feeling dates back to the time of her service in Gavin Hamilton's. The witnesses, who had no end to serve by prevarication or lying, are unanimous on the point. Robert Chambers, who made personal investigations when at Mauchline, considered it "highly probable" that she acted as nurse to Gavin Hamilton's son in July, 1785. Thus, the "pretty long tract of reciprocal affection" (a figurative phrase like "early years" and "youthful days") narrows itself down to the period between an uncertain date in 1785 and May 14th, 1786, during which Burns rightly says "he was not known at all to the world."

That he turned to a former love in the hour of his humiliation and disappointment was only natural; she was near him; she knew all and mayhap pitied him; for certain, she forgave him and accepted his proposals for marriage. If these surmises are deemed improbable, all that can be said is that such improbabilities were, are,

and ever will be, everyday occurrences amongst all classes and conditions of men and women. Eliminating the ambiguous notes to the songs, all that is left of the "mystery" is the history, neither strange nor eventful, of twelve or eighteen months of the life of a humble maiden whose stay was too short in Mauchline to leave lasting memories behind her. His attachment to Jean had brought only bitterness and disappointment; while the love of the Highland maiden, which had survived the Armour ordeal, fell like balm on his wounded soul. After the "farewell" she returned to her parental home to make arrangements for what he terms "their projected change of life." "At the close of the autumn following," he continues, "she crossed the sea to meet me at Greenock, where she had scarce landed when she was seized with a malignant fever which hurried my dear girl to the grave in a few days before I could even hear of her illness."[1]

[1] This we quote from the note appended by Cromek in his *Reliques* to *My Highland Lassie, O*, which he copied from the interleaved copy of *Johnson's Museum*, which was written out by Burns for his friend, Robert Riddell. This volume disappeared shortly after Cromek had perused it. Succeeding editors, therefore, had no alternative, after 1808, but to reproduce Cromek on trust; and this continued till the late Mr. Dick of Newcastle discovered it in London, in 1908, after imprisonment for well-nigh a hundred years, latterly in the obscurity of an eccentric book-collector's library, who left his collection to his housekeeper. On examination, seventeen leaves were found missing, on one

A brief tale with a sad ending; redeemed from the commonplace by general acceptance, as literal fact, of Cromek's imaginary scene on the banks of the "purling brook"; perennially fascinating, because so little regarding the heroine's corporeal being is known; and rendered sublime by the romance of passionate song in which she is embalmed. It requires little reading between the lines to divine what was passing in Burns's mind in the early summer of 1786. The Armours, by rejecting his proposals to implement the irregular marriage, had precluded all hope of reconciliation; Mossgiel had gone from bad to worse, and hungry ruin stared him in the face. There was but one solution of his troubles, and that was to try his fortune in a foreign land, and rid himself of the Armour complications by taking a wife along with him. This resolution he translated into action with firm determination and no

of which this note was bound to have been penned. Cromek's fidelity to the original consequently cannot be tested, and unfortunately his garbling and alterations of the other notes do not inspire confidence. Still, though strictly speaking "suspect," there is little reason to doubt its genuineness in the main. Mr. Dick thus sums up Cromek's offences: "Out of 173 notes, only 127 are verbatim copies; 18 are garbled or imperfect, of which 4 differ entirely from the MS., and another 4 are partly by Burns and partly by Riddell; 14 are written entirely by Riddell or other than Burns; and 14 are not in the MS. at all." The nature of the note quoted in our text does not lend itself to tinkering of Cromek's sort.

loss of time. He entered into an engagement as an estate clerk or bookkeeper in the West Indies,[1] and by the end of July had arranged to sail on board a Clyde vessel bound for Jamaica. Then came the miraculous turn of Fortune's wheel. The Kilmarnock volume was published, and the "obscure, nameless bard," with one bound, had leapt into fame. But ere the close of October, Mary Campbell was laid to rest in the old Churchyard at Greenock. What transpired during the five months between the parting and her death has been left a blank. The family tradition is that some correspondence did take place—one-sided we may safely presume—which was destroyed by her father when death revealed her secret. His name was also scratched from the Bibles—why and when we know not.[2] We may be sure, however, that the events which

[1] His engagement was with Dr. Douglas of Ayr, whose brother, Charles Douglas, was manager of his estate near Port Antonio, in Jamaica. Dr. Douglas was a shareholder of the ill-starred Douglas and Heron's Bank. He was of the Douglases of Garallan, Ayrshire.

[2] The Bibles, through Mary's sisters, came into the possession of a family named Anderson who resided for some time in the village of Renton, Dumbartonshire. William Anderson, a member of this family, emigrated to Canada, taking the Bibles with him, and settled in the neighbourhood of Toronto. Falling into indifferent circumstances, the Bibles were bought, in 1840, by some Scotsmen in Montreal, and sent to the Provost of Ayr, for preservation in the Monument at Alloway, where they are still to be seen.

immediately followed perplexed her relatives who may have failed to make allowance for her inability to keep Burns advised of her movements.[1] However that may be, all that is vouchsafed to us is that he received intimation of her death, which, according to Mrs. Begg, he read in silence with a countenance betraying the intensity of his feelings.

In the light of the whole facts, the " Episode " reveals itself as the outcome of the Poet's justifiable resentment of his treatment by the parents of Jean Armour, which prompted him to give vent to his feelings in impulsive language which has been taken full advantage of by some writers to charge him with duplicity or something worse. An unprejudiced review of the whole evidence establishes beyond doubt that he was as manly and sincere in his dealings with Mary Campbell as he had been with Jean Armour.[2] It is not surprising that the tragic end of the Highland

[1] Few women of the lower ranks could write in those days. Elison Begbie seems to have been one of the few. Jean Armour's accomplishments went no further than the signing of her name ; for her correspondence she always employed an amanuensis. She signed the Session Minute in 1788, and also receipts to Gilbert after the poet's death—all uniformly alike. Elizabeth Paton signs with a cross, flanked by the printed forms of the letters E. P.

[2] Burns's mother's testimony is that he intended to marry Mary Campbell after Jean's acquiescence in her father's orders to destroy the " marriage lines."

maiden, in the cloud of mystery which so long enveloped her, has evoked a universal feeling of sorrowing sympathy, the manifestations of which have been sneered at as "Mariolatry,"—a sort of pagan worship of Saints outwith the Calendar —surely a jaundiced view to take of a pious reverence for the heavenly graces with which Burns has invested her. Of Beatrice, who also died young, we know little beyond what Dante has told us; and if we are content to take her at Dante's valuation, why not Mary at Burns's? The finer emotions have their seat in virtue; the scenes indelibly photographed on our memories are those which are bathed in the rays of purity and innocence, not in the lurid light of sensuality and evil passions. Like Poe's "lost Lenore" Burns's Mary dwells for aye in the "distant Aidenn," radiant in seraphic beauty which can never fade.

When the contemned but highly commendable "Mariolatry" (which by the way must have originated in 1842 at Greenock when a monument to her memory was erected in the West Parish churchyard) culminated in the erection of a statue in her honour at Dunoon, attempts were made to throw doubts on her claims for remembrance by obtruding into her life certain incidents in the life of a woman of the same name which

are recorded in the books of the Kirk Session of Dundonald, Ayrshire.[1] Some of these incidents happen to coincide roughly with certain dates and places connected with Highland Mary's sojourn in Ayrshire, but the only coincidence which applies is the similarity of name and occupation. This second Mary Campbell was in farm service in Dundonald previous to 1784; she was residing in Mauchline in April of that year, where she had become mother of an illegitimate child; she raised an action of paternity in the Civil Court, in 1786, against a farmer named Hay, a parishioner of Dundonald, and succeeded in proving her case; whereupon it was taken up by the ecclesiastical authorities of Dundonald and referred to those of the parish of Stair, to which locality apparently she had removed. The end of the matter was that Hay confessed his guilt, in December, 1787, and did the usual penance.[2] It is when one

[1] These records were known to the present writer half-a-dozen years before they became public property. He brought them under the notice of the Executive of the Federation at the date of their discovery, when the unanimous verdict was that the Dundonald Mary Campbell was a personality apart altogether from Highland Mary. The Stair records have been lost or destroyed. (See Appendix.)

[2] See Appendix C.

The scum of third-hand apocryphal gossip contained in the Train (or Grierson) papers preserved in the Edinburgh

tries to dovetail this story into the narrative already submitted that the absurdity of the proceeding becomes apparent. The implied phenomenon of complete and enduring silence amongst the gossips of Mauchline then and since is almost as great a demand on credulity as the further astounding travesty of fact that Burns's Mary Campbell was alive and able to appear as a party in a case of Kirk discipline fourteen months after she was laid in her grave.[1]

The connection between the experiences we have been considering and the great turning-point of Burns's life is so close that they cannot be looked upon otherwise than in the light of cause and effect. One immediate result was the publication of the volume which brought him into fame; and they came very near being responsible for sending him into tropical exile. This contingency was never absent from his thoughts down to the end of September, and even then he informed his cousin that the date of his departure

University Library, is not worthy of notice. The references to Clarinda are pure fabrications which carry their own refutation in their stupid disregard of dates. Those which involve Mary Campbell require us to believe that Gavin Hamilton had no regard for the honour of his household in choosing his servants.

[1] See Appendix C; also *Burns Chronicle*, Nos. XIX., XXIV., and XXV., for fuller details of Highland Mary and the Irregular Marriage with Jean Armour.

would likely be towards the end of harvest. Dr. Blacklock's letter to Dr. Laurie, the minister of Loudoun, highly commending the Kilmarnock volume and advising a second and enlarged edition under the patronage of the Edinburgh *literati*, was an encouragement he had scarce dared to hope for, and we need not wonder that the promising prospect it opened up induced him ultimately to alter, or rather postpone, his plans, for in Edinburgh he had not given up the idea of emigration. His final accounting with Wilson, his publisher, put him in possession of £20, more than double the amount he aimed at to pay his passage to Jamaica; and so he immediately set about making preparations for his "Edinburgh expedition." [1]

The period between January, 1785, and July, 1786, is the most prolific in Burns's literary career. Never did workman labour so hard and put so many examples of finest workmanship out of his hands as Burns did during these eighteen months when misfortunes were falling thick and fast upon him. His "aim in life"

[1] The poet must have made a rough guess at the net financial result. 612 copies were printed, and sold at 3s.=£91 16s.; paper, printing, and stitching amounted to £35 17s.; the gross balance being £55 19s., reduced to £20 or thereby probably by contingent expenses and trade discounts. Uncut copies of the Kilmarnock volume now bring considerably over £1000; cut copies, according to condition, between £150 and £400.

was now clearly seen ; all the powers within him responded to his call ; and in the "auld clay biggin'" of Mossgiel he worked out his own salvation. In addition to the compositions already mentioned, at Mossgiel were produced *The Holy Fair*, the *Auld Farmer's Salutation to his Mare*, *To a Mouse*, *To a Mountain Daisy*, *The Twa Dogs*, *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, *The Vision*, *Halloween*, *Epistle to a Young Friend*, and the rest which appear in the Kilmarnock volume. But other notable pieces did not find a place there. The *Jolly Beggars*, which was thrown aside on Gilbert's advice and forgotten till Thomson reminded him of it in 1793, did not appear in print till 1799, in which year *Holy Willie's Prayer*, the most perfect satire ever written in any language, also saw the light. The two masterpieces, *Death and Dr. Hornbook* and the *Address to the Unco Guid*, fared better by securing a place in the Edinburgh edition of 1787. Another composition, variously styled *The Court of Equity*, *The Libel Summons*, or *The Fornicator's Court*—a humorous account of the proceedings of the Mauchline mock tribunal formerly mentioned—was also composed at Mossgiel. Though too warm in tone for general reading, it is redolent throughout of the glowing humanity of Burns, and from beginning to end

carries the burlesque to a mirth-provoking pitch peculiarly its own[1] on account of the pseudo-legal terminology employed in trying and sentencing certain culprits—" Clockie Broon " and " Sandie Doo "—who had evaded the lynx eyes of the Kirk Session.

The opinion so often expressed that his first edition contains all upon which his fame rests, ignores the principal outcome of his genius, besides leaving out of count such outstanding examples of his powers as *Tam O' Shanter*, *The Haggis*, *The Ordination*, and other pieces of highest merit published after his death. In the galaxy of poetic literature he is without a rival as a song writer; but for his songs his name would not have been the household word it is. His first edition contains only three songs; the last edition (1794), supervised by himself, contains sixteen. And yet, from his entry into Edinburgh to the end at Dumfries, he contributed something like 250 songs to the musical works of Johnson and Thomson—the former an editor enthusiastic but illiterate, yet possessed

[1] One MS. is dated 12th May, and another 4th June, but neither ever reached the stage of a final draft. It has been surreptitiously published at intervals since 1810. An abridged and composite version will be found in the Aldine edition of 1893. The MSS. in the British Museum are catalogued as the " Egerton MSS." and " Additional MSS."

of sense enough to recognise the master-hand and sink his own pretensions; the latter, an amateur with all the amateur's conceit; a purveyor, but for the intervention of Burns, of drawing-room inanities, and so full of his own crude ideas of words and music that he imagined himself qualified to put the finishing touches both on Burns and Mendelssohn.[1] Many of these lyrics are restorations of old songs—stock, lock, and barrel; others so deftly interwoven with old shreds and patches that it is impossible to say whether the whole is his or only part; the majority, native gold fresh from the mint; the whole, a flood of sweetest melody which has overspread the world. He would accept no pecuniary recompense for them, they were above or below price; as for fame, to few of them did he adhibit his name, even the world's anthem, *Auld Langsyne*, he deliberately left unsigned. It was with work of this kind that he exercised his powers in the

[1] The poet, Mrs. Begg informed Capt. Charles Gray, R.N., attended a singing class at Lochlea and Mossgiel for several months, and he designates himself "poet and fiddler" to Charles Sharpe of Hoddam. Murdoch is responsible for the traditional view that he had neither appreciation nor knowledge of music. He certainly was not versed in the higher departments of the art, but he could roughly take down a melody in musical notation and run over the notes on his violin. He had a supersensitive ear for an expressive melody, and often showed himself the superior of Thomson in the choice of appropriate tunes. He was the first and only poet, so far as is known, who made a point of mastering the air of a song before writing the words.

intervals of leisure snatched from the discharge of most exacting official duties, during the last eight years of his life. R. L. Stevenson takes upon himself to censure him for frittering away these years "whittling cherry stones" (cutting cameos on Scotch pebbles is nearer the mark), though he of all men should have known that sustained literary effort demands an atmosphere conducive to studious application which was unattainable owing to the nature of Burns's vocation. To cast about for reasons why the projected "Poet's Progress" and the drama of Bruce's exploits never took practical shape is nothing short of idle, barren, and, in not a few instances, most ungenerous speculation.

The Kilmarnock volume was so well received that the whole edition was sold off in a few weeks. Everywhere it was received with acclamation and eagerly read by gentle and simple, the learned and ignorant, who could procure a copy. One of the first fruits of his fame was the friendship of Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, who was so pleased with the perusal of a borrowed copy that she sent an express messenger to Mossgiel for half a dozen copies for herself and friends. The relations between Burns and this estimable woman have no parallel in the whole annals of literature. At the date of her first letter to Burns she was a

widow, fifty-six years of age, and the mother of thirteen children—a high-principled, sensible, kindly matron of exceptional talents, literary tastes, and tolerant religious views; severely critical of conduct, though far from being uncharitably censorious. Socially the superior of Burns, she never assumed the air of a patron; on the contrary, she uniformly treated him as an equal, and never tired of dilating on his intellectual superiority. Her feeling towards Burns was akin to that of a mother for a supremely gifted son; she advised, reproved, commended, and occasionally scolded him in the plainest of terms, all with the best intentions. She had a keen appreciation of poetry, but her judgment was warped by the traditions of the artificial school in which she had been reared; moreover, she never realised that Burns's mission was not to fulfil but destroy these traditions. Thomson, of *The Seasons*, was to her the embodiment of all that is excellent in poetic composition; and one cannot read her voluminous letters[1] without coming to the conclusion that, behind all her criticisms of Burns, there was a conviction that sublimity of thought suffered by being wedded to the vulgar tongue.

[1] *Robert Burns and Mrs. Dunlop*, by Dr. Wm. Wallace. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898.

In brief terms, it may be said that her temperament and training made her the excellent woman she was, and the bad Burns critic she proved herself to be. "I have been told," she wrote him, "that Voltaire read all his manuscripts to an old woman and printed nothing but what she approved. I wish you would name me to her office." For Mrs. Dunlop, the critic, Burns had scant respect; but for her personal qualities he had a regard approaching veneration. He was ever careful of the nature of the pieces he forwarded to her, and he listened to her amending suggestions with stolid imperturbability, though these were frequently urged to the verge of his patience. The impassable gulf between her poetical standard and his may be measured by her unqualified condemnation of *Tam O' Shanter* and her rapturous admiration of *The Cotter's Saturday Night* which, she repeatedly asserted, marked the high watermark of his genius.[1] She was eminently practical in her friendship; unwearied in trying to better the worldly circumstances of the Poet; and it may be matter of surprise to many that she first thought of a military career for him through her

[1] He was grievously disappointed at her reception of *Tam O' Shanter*. The first copy sent her seems to have been incomplete.

family influence.[1] She also tried to secure for him the appointment of first occupant of the Chair of Agriculture in the University of Edinburgh, which ended in disappointment, the donor of the endowment having insisted on his right of nomination. There are, besides, constant allusions in the correspondence to attempts on her part to influence her friends on the Board of Excise in favour of Burns's professional promotion.[2]

An opinion has gained currency that she forsook Burns in his later years, which seems to have originated in the marked falling-off in the correspondence after he removed to Dumfries. Burns himself is to blame for this. He allowed her letters to lie for long periods without reply; and when he did reply she complained in upbraiding terms that he never appeared to have read her letters with any degree of attention. In 1794, she thus addresses him,—"This is the fifth time I have wrote you since I have been able to draw one line in return. What have I done to deserve this?" Again, writing from

[1] Burns was not averse to the proposal if he had had the means of buying a commission.

[2] Before he left for Edinburgh, Mr. Aitken ("Orator Bob") and some of his Ayrshire friends endeavoured to secure for him an Excise appointment, for which his three months' tuition at Kirkoswald was presumably held to be a preparation.

London (12th January, 1795), she says,—"I would again beg your alleviating the pang by letting me hear at 410 miles distance how you and all yours are, and whether you ever recollect such a creature as I was once an inhabitant of the county to which your residence has, I hope, added renown." The warmest friendship was bound to cool under such treatment, however willing she may have been to make reasonable allowances.[1] Yet she remained his friend to the last and exerted herself to the utmost to provide for his widow and children. The moving letter the poet addressed to her on his death-bed was not left unanswered. "Your reply gave great ease and satisfaction to him," Lewars informed her on behalf of the widow, "and was the last thing he was capable of perusing and understanding." Burns left many faithful friends behind him, but none truer, wiser, and more generous of sympathy than Mrs. Dunlop.

Turning again to Mossgiel, Burns was now on the threshold of a new social world—a world he had hitherto looked upon with jealousy and suspicion. Mrs. Dunlop made him free of

[1] Burns's remissness in the correspondence may be accounted for by the peremptory nature of most of her queries and criticisms, to which his replies were usually a discreet silence, preferring to exasperate her, rather than risk a quarrel by engaging in acrimonious discussions.

Dunlop House, and he had enjoyed the refined society of Loudoun Manse, which evoked an appropriate expression of his feelings in verse. Musing as he returned from one of his visits there, the *Gloomy Night is Gathering Fast* voices the gloomy thoughts which had again taken possession of him ; and his *Epistle to Major Logan*, also of this date, is an indication that the Armour tribulation was far from being forgotten. This desponding frame of mind was partially dispelled a day or two afterwards, when, through the friendship of Dr. Mackenzie, he "dinnered" with Lord Daer at Dugald Stewart's house in Catrine, and found that nobleman neither "coof" nor "fool." But when he tried to enter the charmed circle on the strength of his own credentials, he was met with what looks very like a rebuff. Encouraged by the appreciative reception of *The Braes o' Ballochmyle* by the Whitefoords, he composed *The Bonie Lass o' Ballochmyle* in honour of Miss Alexander, whose family had recently purchased the estate, and forwarded the song to her, requesting permission to publish it in the forthcoming Edinburgh edition.[1] The lady, to whom he was a

[1] This song is written in the English tongue ; there is not a Scots word in it from beginning to end ; and only two words conform to Scots orthography. It is also an outstanding example of the leading feature of all his love songs—be his heroines high or low in social position, to him they were "country

comparative stranger, bewildered perhaps by the passionate terms in which the lyric is couched, took no notice of his communication, which greatly mortified him.[1]

But more palatial mansions were soon to open their portals to him, through which he came and went the observed of all observers in fashionable, titled, and literary Edinburgh. He had a foretaste of the reception awaiting him there by the hospitalities offered him on the way. Leaving Mossgiel on the 27th of November he set out on a borrowed pony, *via* Biggar, and the same night reached the farmhouse of Covington Mains, where an impromptu assembly of admirers had been convened to do him honour. Next day, after more feasting, he reached Edinburgh, and took up his abode in the humble lodgings of his old friend and companion, John Richmond, law clerk, who had left Mauchline at the end of 1785 with a view to advancement in his profession.[2] Here he remained till October, 1787, when he removed to the

maids," and he their "happy country swain." He could sing of a milkmaid but not of her mistress in the capacity of lady of the manor.

[1] Miss Alexander died in Glasgow, unmarried, at an advanced age.

[2] In a letter to Ballantyne (14th January, 1787) he gives a pen-and-ink sketch of Mrs. Carfrae, the landlady, an entertaining example of Burns's humorous prose.

house of William Cruickshank, one of the teachers in the High School, with whom and William Nicol, classical master in the same institution, he was on terms of closest friendship. From first to last, his sojourn in Edinburgh covered a period of sixteen months, during which he made excursions to the Borders, the Highlands, and the West Country, before settling down with his wife at Ellisland, as farmer and Excise Officer for the surrounding district.

CHAPTER III

EDINBURGH

Burns's reception in Edinburgh was truly phenomenal. Citizens of every rank vied with each other in proffering hospitality and doing him honour; and in a remarkably short time his figure was a familiar one in all kinds of public and private functions. He was, from his initiation at Tarbolton, an enthusiastic Freemason, and one has only to scan the list of those who first took him by the hand to discover that he was greatly beholden to the Brethren of the mystic tie for much of his social success. Dalrymple, of Orangefield (nephew of "Dalrymple mild"), an Ayrshire man and prominent Freemason, with whom he had some previous acquaintance, was the first person of position he approached; and it was through him that he secured the patronage of the Glencairn family, who were his relations by marriage. Creech, the publisher, had been tutor to the Earl of Glencairn, who was related to the Earl of Buchan, whose brother

was Harry Erskine. Seemingly too preoccupied, he did not call on Dr. Blacklock, the blind poet, till the end of December, though, but for his timely intervention, the emigration resolution would assuredly have been carried into effect. On 7th December, he attended a meeting of the Kilwinning Canongate Lodge, and wrote the same day to Gavin Hamilton that he would "soon be the tenth worthy and the eighth wise man of the world." On 13th January following, at a meeting of St. Andrews Lodge, the Grandmaster Charteris and all the Grand Lodge of Scotland attending as visitors, Brother Burns was hailed as "Caledonia's Bard" with rapturous applause.

Professor Dugald Stewart had brought the Kilmarnock edition under the notice of Henry Mackenzie, editor of *The Lounger*, in which periodical a laudatory review of the work appeared on 9th December. Dr. Blair, Professor of Rhetoric, also used all his influence to bring him into notice. The Earl of Glencairn influenced the Caledonian Hunt to subscribe for 100 copies of the new edition, and the Earl of Eglinton forwarded the poet £10 as a donation to the subscribers' fund. Another subscription of the same amount was sent by Patrick Miller, of Dalswinton (son of Chief Justice Miller of Barskimming, the "aged Judge" of *The Vision*),

who afterwards became his landlord at Ellisland.[1] His letters to his friends at this date are jubilant over the patronage extended to him, without a trace of vainglorious elation or egotistical boasting. He had beforehand deliberately estimated his own value as a man and a poet—an estimate which remained unaffected by the ebullition of the "nine days' wonder"; and he again and again expressed his conviction that he would be relegated to obscurity when, curiosity being satiated, the plaudits of the multitude would become less fervid or altogether cease.

Shortly after his arrival, he was received by the Duchess of Gordon, a good-hearted, clever, somewhat eccentric woman with literary leanings, who introduced him to the fashionable "set" of the city, with whose aid she immediately set about making the Poet the lion of the season. At the date of Burns's visit there was an interregnum in the literary life of Edinburgh. Hume, Smith, Robertson, Clark, Ferguson, "giants in the land," according to Scott, had played their parts, and the star of the "Great Unknown" had not yet risen.[2]

[1] The subscribers' names extend to 38 printed pages in the Edinburgh edition. The total number is 1625, exclusive of many which were inadvertently omitted or received too late for entry on the printed list.

[2] The meeting of Burns and Scott in the house of Dr. Adam Ferguson, when Scott was a mere lad, need not here be rehearsed.

Of talented young men there was no scarcity, few of whom, however, have left an enduring mark in the world of letters. Scott's estimate of Mackenzie as "the last link of the chain which connected Scottish literature of the present age with the past," posterity has failed to endorse. Lord Monboddo, then one of the most outstanding figures in literary Edinburgh and perhaps the most appreciative of Burns's admirers, is now a fossil on the book shelves of the antiquary. But the commendation these men of culture so generously lavished on Burns was a passport to the select circles in which both were potent influences at that period. "The town is at present agog with the Ploughman Poet," wrote Mrs. Cockburn[1] to one of her friends, from which we may understand that his time was fully occupied by the exactions of his new environment.

Dining-room discussions with learned *savants*, drawing-room encounters with the gay Duchess and her followers, and the accompanying fêting and feasting continued for the greater part of 1787; and through it all Burns comported himself as to the manner born.

The interesting part of the incident is Scott's impressions of the poet's personal appearance, penned from youthful recollection.

[1] Authoress of *The Flowers of the Forest.*

The Duchess of Gordon confessed he was the only man she ever met who " completely carried her off her feet." Dugald Stewart speaks of the charm of his conversation, and adds, " I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities. His manner of speaking in public had evidently the marks of practice in extempore elocution." " I saw him at an assembly t'other night," writes Professor Dalzel, " the Duchess of Gordon and other ladies of rank took notice of him ; he behaves wonderfully well." " Burns could have governed," wrote Carlyle in 1840, " debated in National Assemblies, and politicised as few could . . . You would think it strange," he continues in *Heroes and Hero Worship*, " if I called Burns the most gifted British soul in all that century of his ; and yet I believe the day is coming when there will be little danger in saying so. His writings, all that he *did* under such obstructions, are only a poor fragment of him." It was Carlyle who first compared Burns with Mirabeau, and Mr. Henley " pilfered " (his own word in similar case) Carlyle's conclusions, happily without expanding them, as he did those of Stevenson contrasting Burns with Don Juan. His hoddin-grey had been exchanged for a fashionable suit of buff and blue, buckskin breeches,

and top-boots *à la mode*, as he appears in the full-length portrait by Nasmyth. The bust portrait by the same artist, for which Burns gave sittings, was engraved by John Beugo for the frontispiece of the Edinburgh edition. This bust and the Beugo engraving form the fountain-head of the thousand and one adaptations and caricatures which from that date to this have done duty as presentments of the Bard.[1] Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, that eccentric Edinburgh *literateur* and artist, who survived till the middle of last century and who in his boyhood and youth often saw Burns, when asked his opinion of the doubtful Taylor portrait, replied, "Like all his other portraits I have seen, this one does not give the idea of so good-looking a person as he was. The print of him in the Edinburgh edition (Beugo's engraving) I always thought like, but thinner-faced than I remembered him till death had

[1] Of the bust portrait Nasmyth executed two replicas—one for George Thomson and the other for Mr. Cathcart of Auchendrane, Ayrshire. The full-length Nasmyth was sketched from the bust portrait and a pencil drawing of the figure. Beugo touched up his plate from sittings. The Dumfries portrait (known as the Watson-Reid miniature) was painted from the life. The Miers silhouette (there was another by an artist named Houghton) was also taken from the life; the Skirving Drawing (head only) is an idealised sketch from the Nasmyth; the Taylor portrait, said to be from sittings, is not free from suspicion. Raeburn, who was in Rome in 1787, painted a copy of the Nasmyth for Cadell and Davis, publishers, London, in 1803. What became of this work is not yet certainly known.

begun his conquest." In another connection, he writes, "Whenever I saw him his hair hung very lank and spoilt his good-looking face—I think it is so painted by Nasmyth. Burns had a very good countenance—but coarse—and good dark eyes. There was something wrong about his shoulders I well remember—too round perhaps." Syme, in 1829, recorded his recollections in these terms,—"His eyes and lips—the first remarkable for fire, and the second for flexibility—formed at all times an index of his mind. In his animated moments, and particularly when his anger was roused by instances of tergiversation, meanness or tyranny, they were actually like coals of living fire."

He was now a man about town and looked it. The gaiety of the life imposed upon him showed little slackening at the beginning of the second winter of his sojourn, which moved Mrs. Cockburn to express the fear that "the man will be spoiled if he can spoil." But it was not all sunshine and roses. Envious tongues set afloat high-coloured versions of the Armour story, which were contradicted as occasion occurred by Sir John Whitefoord, who knew the facts at first-hand, and to whom the grateful poet sent a letter of thanks "for the warmth with which he had interposed on his

behalf." A clumsy attempt in rhyme, made through the medium of a London newspaper, to discredit him in the eyes of the Duchess of Gordon, was foiled by the astuteness of that lady herself who, strange to say, failed in influencing him sufficiently through the medium of the accustomed regimen which produced the usual complimentary lyric.[1] All that we know of the heroine of *Ye wild mossy Mountains* is the allusion, in a letter to Gavin Hamilton, to "a very pretty girl, a Lothian farmer's daughter," whom he had almost persuaded to accompany him to the West Country. City life was not congenial to his

[1] Nothing that Mr. Henley has written concerning Burns more clearly reveals the bias of his mind than his laboured effort in vol. iv. (pp. 77-81) to fasten the authorship of this manufactured Scots doggerel on Burns to his discredit, in face of the poet's indignant repudiation of the Brummagen rubbish and his emphatic declaration that he "never composed a line on the Duchess of Gordon in his life." Mr. Henley incorporates three of the stanzas in his Burns text without giving any reason for this preference, nor for his rejection of the "disrespectful stanza" which appeared first in the *Star* and the "silly verses" which followed, which the curious will find in Chambers's edition, edited by Dr. Wallace, 1896 (vol. iii. pp. 242-245). The name of the correspondent of the *Star*—the putative godfather of the libel—is given, in unison with the rest of the elephantine joke, as "Dr. Theodore Theobald Theophilus Tripe," a most appropriate cognomen for a vendor of literary offal "concocted in a newspaper office" along with the "certain others" of similar nature to which Mr. Henley refers. It is quite evident that the point of the discussion is levelled at Mr. Henley's *bête noir*—the shadowy and sinful Common Burnsite. See *Burns Chronicle*, (No. xxiii.)—"Robert Burns and London," by Philip Sulley.

Muse, or it may have been that his recent feverish activity at Mossgiel had brought about a reaction. *The Haggis*, in his best Scots style, and the *Address to Edinburgh*—a typical example of his English manner—are the most notable compositions of the early Edinburgh days. So far as can be gleaned from contemporary testimony, he conformed to the prevalent social customs without laying himself open to censure.[1] But the sidelights in the Clarinda correspondence reveal the deleterious effects on his constitution of the fashionable dissipation which everywhere prevailed and from which there was no escape for him but immediate return to Mossgiel and the temperate life he had hitherto led.

The alliterative appellation conferred on Burns by Mrs. Cockburn reveals in abbreviated form the attitude assumed towards him by the literary hierarchy of Edinburgh. They looked upon him as a pied *rara avis*—at best an albino amongst the blackbirds. It was conceivable that a poet might become a ploughman; the wondering

[1] Dr. Blair, in a somewhat patronising letter to Burns (May, 1787), uses these words: "In being brought out all at once from the shadow of deepest privacy to so great a share of public notice and observation, you had to stand a severe trial. I am happy that you have stood it so well; and as far as I have known or heard, though in the midst of many temptations, without reproach to your character and behaviour."

doubt was that a ploughman could be transformed into a poet. All his early reviewers harp persistently on his humble birth, scanty education, and lowly calling, as if these were the principal, if not the only, recommendations to their august notice.[1] This pitying patronage lurks in Mackenzie's article in *The Lounger*, and is made more apparent in his contribution to the *Monthly Review*, written in the same month, in which he descants on the " disgusting orthography and measures " of many of the pieces in the Kilmarnock volume, notwithstanding his quotation of the pregnant Latin maxim, *poeta nascitur non fit*, in his opening sentence.[2] From this criticism at large he excludes the lines, *To a Mouse* and *To a Mountain Daisy*, giving as reason that they are equal in delicate tenderness to the idylls of Madame Deschantières (a forgotten French poetess of the previous century), in ludicrous forgetfulness that she wrote in a tongue quite as " disgusting," because unintelli-

[1] In 1822 Sir Walter Scott wrote to Mackenzie : " I think you should have treated as no other person perhaps is entitled to treat of the genius of Burns, to whom I think great injustice has been done by always connecting the wonderful poems he has produced with the circumstance of his being a ploughman."

[2] It is a curious coincidence that a hundred and odd years later, Mr. Henley characterises Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* as " a silly and disgusting book," though written in the polished English of the time.

gible, to the ordinary English ear as the Scots dialect.[1]

Though Jeffrey's essay is pitched in similar key, it shows sounder judgment and greater breadth of view. In his introduction he declares that Burns cannot be rightly estimated as a poet till the vulgar wonder at his having been a ploughman entirely disappears. He here puts his finger on the initial error of the *literati* of Edinburgh in their valuation of Burns, on which he proceeds to expatiate at greater length. "It is impossible," he says, "to read the productions of Burns, along with his history, without forming a higher idea of the intelligence, taste, and accomplishments of the peasantry than most in the higher ranks are disposed to entertain. . . . Not only good sense and enlightened morality, but literature and talents for speculation are far more generally diffused in society than is generally imagined, . . . and the actual intelligence of the lower orders will be found very far to exceed the ordinary estimates of their superiors." Here we have an enlightened contemporary opinion of the peasantry and common people of Scotland in the year 1786, from one who was anything but an indiscriminate eulogist of Burns.

[1] Sibbald, of the *Edinburgh Magazine*, was the first editor to take notice of Burns in a review published in November—several weeks before Mackenzie's article.

Jeffrey lived long enough to form a juster opinion of Burns than he seemingly held in 1809. This is what he wrote to his friend Empson, in 1837: "I could lie down in the dirt, and cry and grovel there, I think, for a century, to save such a soul as Burns from the suffering and the contamination and the degradation which these same arrangements (the social conditions existing) imposed upon him. What a creature, not only in genius, but in nobleness of character: potentially at least, if right models had been put *gently* before him. . . . When I think on *his* position, I have no feeling for the *ideal* poverty of your Wordsworths or Coleridges—poor, peddling, whining drivellers in comparison with him; though they too should have been richer."

Mr. Henley writes of the "station and time" of Burns in totally different terms more than a century later. "He (Burns) was absolutely of his station and his time; the poor-living, lewd, grimy, free-spoken, ribald old Scots peasant world. I do not (he adds in a footnote) forget its many solid and admirable virtues; but its elements were mixed, and it was to the grosser that the Burns of these and other rhymes appealed." These elements, as we elsewhere contend, were not "mixed"; they lay in contact distinct from each other, like the strata in a geological

section; hence the foregoing formidable array of descriptive expletives does not apply to William Burnes and his family, nor to any member of the class to which he belonged. The "rhymes" referred to—which, by the way, Mr. Henley would account "precious" from the literary point of view—have been read and appreciated ever since for their broad humour by thousands far removed in social position from the unlettered and ignorant "peasant world" so picturesquely delineated.[1] Peasant is not essentially an opprobrious term, yet nothing but opprobrium can possibly be deduced from the placing of Burns in the company of degenerate boors, offal-fed, and filthy of body as well as of mind. How many in the "peasant world" conjured up could have comported themselves in the society of the learned and the great as Burns did, and won so much admiration for talents and breeding, apart altogether from his genius? If he was from a literary point of view "first and last a peasant," he was so by deliberate choice; he was not necessarily either a tramp or mendicant because he wrote the *Jolly Beggars*; and this brings us to the second

[1] Mr. Henley shows marked appreciation of what he and Stevenson agreed to call the "Squalid Picturesque," full-flavoured samples of which will be found in his footnote quotations from Saunders Tait. A better-balanced account of Saunders and his rhymes will be found in Paterson's *Contemporaries of Burns*, published in 1840.

error of his early valuators as well as some of more recent date. Poesy was then looked upon less as a divine gift than an occult art which demanded a special training under stipulated conditions and arbitrary regulations—a kind of skilled labour having for its object the grinding and polishing of words and phrases, frequently carried to the vanishing point of the substance. Work of this kind was repellent to the genius of Burns; it "gravelled him to death." "If you are for English verses," he writes in reply to Thomson's first letter requesting his services for his Collection, "there is—on my part—an end of the matter." But he was no hob-nailed rustic in hoddin-grey to whom language other than his own *patois* was inarticulate sound. Though the superfine critic has found fault with it for lack of flexibility and ease, few will deny that he could both speak and write the English language with force and elegance.

The same critical authority amplifies the charge by affirming that if he had written nothing but English verse, he would have been ranked among the mediocrities or consigned to oblivion. That is a question which cannot be disposed of by pitting opinion against opinion, and to discuss it here is outwith our present task. Suffice it to say that

many of his Scots songs and not a few of his poems can be transformed into pure English compositions, if that were the only object in view, by deleting a stray word here and there and substituting an English synonym, or changing the orthography. "Had he written," again to quote Carlyle, "even what he did write, in the general language of England, I doubt not but he had already become universally recognised as being, or capable to be, one of our greatest men." That is to say, had he been born under different conditions he would have proved himself as great a master of the English language as of the Scottish dialect. His subjects were selected from his surroundings, and he painted them in their natural colours, taking up the unfinished work of Ramsay and Fergusson which had become overlaid by that of the artificial school which it was his mission to supersede. The influence of Shenstone and others of the same school is clearly discernible in his earlier efforts, but, fortunately for the national literature, he effectually threw it off before the volcanic outburst of his native genius at Mossgiel. In some of his later compositions, however, the influence of these models of the "grand style" is perfectly obvious. He wrote "chiefly in the Scottish dialect," but it was much more than a dialect.

It was then a living tongue, the language of a whole country, according to Lord Jeffrey, and by no means peculiar to the vulgar—the language of a Court, and with a continuous literature of its own. To speak it, therefore, and more especially to write it, was no distinguishing mark of the peasant.

For long after the removal of the Court to London, the Scottish language remained a separate tongue, and it was not till towards the end of the seventeenth century that there was any serious encroachment on its province. Then as now, Snobdom flourished everywhere, whose apish imitation of the manners of its superiors declared itself both in the social and literary spheres—in the latter, by an affected ignorance and denunciation of the Vernacular as a proper vehicle for the expression of lofty thought. Even before Ramsay's day, these influences had operated so uninterruptedly for such a length of time that the national literature was in danger of losing its national character, supplanted, as it was, by a stereotyped Anglican style which had been borrowed and blessed by the literary Daniels who monopolised the judgment seats. These quidnuncs had their followers, man being a gregarious animal whose instinct to follow the lead has survived through all the gradations of civilisation. One has a feeling of disappointment

at finding Mrs. Dunlop and Dr. Moore—both true-bred Scots—amongst the detractors of their mother tongue by advocating its disuse in Scottish literature. To all their entreaties to relinquish it, Burns turned a deaf ear. He had deliberately gauged the possibilities of his genius and well knew where his strength lay. He was "Coila's own inspired Bard"—inspired not to build up the lofty rhyme for the delectation of the few, but to delight the many by giving to humble life and lowly things "that touch of Nature which makes the whole world kin."[1]

He found his native tongue decadent, partly dead; and left it a classic preserved for all time in his poems and songs. If the highest niche assigned him in the Temple of Fame by the judges who despise juries be on a level with the greatest lyrical poets of the ages, so be it; but let him rank with the Immortals without the prefix which derogates from his merits, and which, we are convinced, was first used as a counterpoise savouring of apology for his intru-

[1] Robert Pollock (1799-1827), also of peasant origin and educated for the Church, wrote in the lofty Miltonic style, and achieved great popularity in an epoch when the Scottish mind was obsessed with polemical theology. His *Course of Time* ran to twenty editions, and contains many passages sublime both in thought and expression; yet he is now seldom read and never quoted. Michael Bruce, who wrote in similar style, lives only in his *Ode to the Cuckoo*.

sion where the passport demanded was the veneer of drilled culture and refinement decreed by the close guild in possession. Ramsay first set the heather on fire, and Fergusson carried it on. It was they whom Burns strove to emulate; his torch was lighted at their flame; he followed in their footsteps; and it is questionable whether his line of poetic ancestry goes much further back, in the absence of any admission on his part of familiarity with the writings of Lindsay, Dunbar, and the other Scottish poets, of a more remote generation than Ramsay's.

Besides Masonic lodges and learned societies, Edinburgh at that epoch teemed with convivial clubs of every description, the membership of which for the most part was drawn from the bacchanalian element spoken of in our introductory chapter. One of these clubs, the Crochallan Fencibles, founded by William Smellie, Lord Newton, Charles Hay, William Dunbar, and a few more notables of the Parliament House, had its meeting-place in a tavern kept by a genial old Highlander, Dannie Douglas, whose favourite song, "Cro Chalien" (Colin's Cattle), suggested part of the name, the addition being a humorous adaptation from the Bonaparte Volunteer movement which was then in full swing. To this Bohemian resort Burns was introduced by Smellie,

his printer, in January, 1787. The meetings were, to speak frankly, hilarious symposiums, characterised by high jinks and horse-play often of the roughest sort. William Cleghorn, Saughton Mills, was on the muster-roll of this rollicking regiment, and one of the most regular attenders, which supplies the key to much of Burns's correspondence with him. How the revelry was stimulated and diversified is better left to the imagination than described. Burns's marvellous knowledge of the song literature of Scotland was acquired by untiring collection of every old stanza, chorus, fragment and line which his reading or professional journeyings threw in his way.[1]

The bulk of these compositions, says Robert Chambers, "in strange contrast to the grave and religious character of the Scottish people, contained a wonderful quantity of indecorous verse expressive of a profound sense of the ludicrous in connection with the sexual affections."[2] When Burns unearthed a black diamond from the mine in which he was continually digging, he hurriedly jotted

[1] It has been surmised that he had access to David Herd's unpublished MSS. when in Edinburgh, but there is no positive proof on the point. Mr. Henley, however, takes the fact for granted.

[2] *John Anderson, my joe, Comin' through the Rye, Green grow the rashes*, for instance, are most indecorous songs in the original versions.

it down, and despatched it at the first opportunity to the Crochallan jesters, but not as a rule without the precaution of privacy. Copies he kept for his own use as hints for purified versions for Johnson and Thomson in a MS. book which he carefully kept under lock and key. After his death an unprincipled printer obtained possession of it from Mrs. Burns on false pretences, and published it in mean form in Dumfries, *circa* 1800, but without in any way connecting Burns's name with it.[1] It was not till 1827 that a collection of English, Scots, and Irish canticular obscenities, entirely different from the Dumfries original, was issued with Burns's name on the title-page. Since that date this collection has been surreptitiously put upon the market at intervals, with a great air of mystery, its crass editorial ignorance and slovenly misprints on almost every page betraying its disreputable origin. *The Merry Muses*—the title by which it is known—has done incalculable harm to the poet's reputation. It ran an unchallenged subterranean course for decades owing to its disreputable nature and the unwillingness of

[1] So far as known only one copy of this Dumfries publication has survived. To counteract the influence of the spurious editions which followed, this copy was reprinted in 1911, under the auspices of the Burns Federation, with introduction and notes, the issue being strictly limited to subscribers only.

editors to tackle the unsavoury subject and place it in its true light. To crown his rascality, the Dumfries miscreant retained the MS. book and disposed of it in detached leaves, a few of which still find their way into the collector's album, the fact of their being genuine autographs being received by those who know no better as unchallengeable proof of authorship.[1]

The poet's communications to the Crochallan Club, which were invariably addressed to Cleghorn, have been productive of as much mischief—a warning, as Robert Chambers sagely remarks, to all men of letters to eschew clandestine literature of the kind. Byron misunderstood these letters and drew wrong conclusions from them. In his *Journal* and also in letters to his friends, Bowles and Hodgson, he alludes to a packet of "Burns's unpublished and never-to-be-published letters full of oaths and obscene songs" (Byron here exaggerates) which had been lent him for perusal by his friend, Allen. Who was Allen and how did these letters come into his possession? Cleghorn married a widow named Mrs. Allen, who by her first husband had a son, John, who was librarian to Lord Holland when Byron made his

[1] Every collector now knows that a piece in Burns's handwriting is no proof *per se*, that he is the author of the text.

acquaintance. Being Cleghorn's step-son he inherited his estate and personal effects, amongst the latter being the letters in question. Byron correctly describes the objectionable passages as "postscripts to his serious and sentimental letters"; but what he did not and could not possibly know was that these postscripts were intended for Club consumption, and had much the same connection with the subject-matter of the letters as newspaper cuttings. The Byron intervention consequently resolves itself into a violation of the privacy of confidential letters between Burns and Cleghorn—an eventuality never dreamed of by Burns, for he repeatedly cautioned Cleghorn and other correspondents in similar case to exercise the utmost care in preserving the privacy of the communications.[1] In a letter to McMurdo (December, 1793) acceding to that gentleman's request for a perusal of the MS. book, Burns with his usual

[1] George Gilfillan, in his Burns encounter, in 1847, with Hugh Macdonald (of *Rambles* fame), set great store by his Byron quotations, of the origin and intent of which he was utterly ignorant. Constitutionally resentful of contradiction, he does not cut a dignified figure in the controversy. (See *Burns Chronicle* No. IV., 1895). Byron's estimate of Burns will be found in his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, in the passage beginning:

> "Scotland! still proudly claim thy native Bard,
> And be thy praise his first, his best reward;
> Yet not with thee alone his name should live,
> But own the vast renown a world can give."

honesty appends this note, "The collection has cost me a good deal of pains; and there is not another copy of it in the world; five or six glances at them would probably more than suffice you. A very few of them are my own." To James Hoy, Gordon Castle, when replying to a similar application, he writes, "They may make you laugh a little, which on the whole is the best way of spending one's precious hours and still more precious breath."

A careful analysis of the contents of the original Dumfries volume makes it certain that out of some ninety compositions, Burns's essays in the same walk do not amount to more than the very small fraction he confesses to.[1] Replying to Mrs. Dunlop, who had been told by a friend that he was the author of some free-spoken verses circulating in certain quarters, he says,—"That I am the author of the verses alluded to in your letter is what I much doubt. You may guess that the convivial hours of men have their mysteries of wit and mirth; and I hold it a piece of contemptible baseness to detail the sallies of thoughtless merriment to the ear of cool sobriety or female delicacy." With characteristic candour, be it observed, he does

[1] Not more than half-a-dozen out of the total are traceable to his pen.

not absolutely deny the charge, nor does it occur to him that one or other of his confidential correspondents might have broken faith with him.

If ever a literary celebrity had reason for praying to be delivered from his friends, that man was Robert Burns. Mistaken zeal on the part of his admirers has done as much harm to his memory as the gutter-raking of his detractors. When the hand of death was upon him he expressed to Maria Riddell the most poignant regret that he had deferred till too late the setting of his house in order, because he feared that "letters and verses written with unguarded and improper freedom, and which he earnestly wished to have buried in oblivion, would be handed about by idle vanity or malevolence to blast his fame." The sequel has proved this fear only too well founded. To their eternal disgrace, certain correspondents, whom he trusted, preserved and left behind them communications of the most private nature which should have been consigned to the flames after the first perusal. Chief among these offenders are Cleghorn and Ainslie. The latter, whatever he may have been in his youth, is anything but an imposing figure in his later years.[1] In 1794, Burns writes of him in

[1] James Hogg has given us this sketch of him in the era of the *Noctes Ambrosianae*. "He is a downright, honest, sleepy-

his last letter to Clarinda,—" I had a letter from him a while ago, but it was so dry, so distant, so like a card to one of his clients, that I could scarce bear to read it, and have not yet answered it." Not a word of reproach for this fair-weather friend whose letter was never answered, so far as the record shows; yet he calls him " a good honest fellow," then follows this outburst of wounded feeling,—" That fame does not blow her trumpet at my approach *now* as she did *then*, when he first honoured me with his friendship, yet I am as proud as ever, and when I am laid in my grave, I wish to be stretched at my full length, that I may occupy every inch of ground I have a right to."

In a history of Scottish Folksong the " unique and precious collection " made by Burns (so Mr. Henley writes of it) falls to be assigned its proper place as a literary landmark of its period. But the association of Burns's name, either as author or editor, with the ribald volumes which have

headed, kind-hearted gentleman. I have seen him fall asleep in the blue parlour at Ambrose's, with North in the chair and myself as croupier; that is a constitutional failing he cannot help." Every Burnsian, of course, knows the *locus classicus* of *Robin shure in Hairst.* We have seen an unpublished letter from Burns, addressed to him during the Border tour, which Ainslie preserved, notwithstanding the proof it contains that he also was not free from the " fashionable failing " of the time we have already alluded to. He wrote religious booklets in his maturer years, and survived till 1838.

from time to time been covertly issued by unprincipled publishers for dishonourable gain is one of the grossest outrages ever perpetrated on the memory of a man of genius. No man of his time had a fuller knowledge of Scottish song, nor a more intimate acquaintance with its published literature. Wide and varied as his knowledge was, it is absurd to suppose, as the editors of the *Centenary Edition* evidently do, that his reading included every English, Scottish, and Irish chapbook, broadside, pasquinade, and penny song-book that ever found its way into pedlar's pack, the contents of which he made his own by dexterous paraphrasing or bare-faced plagiarism.

That he found a good deal of his raw material amongst the *débris* of the elder Scottish Muse is a recognised fact, repeatedly subscribed to by himself. Whatever the intention, the discoveries of the chap-book hunters form a perfect storehouse of proof that his finished work bears much the same relation to his raw material as the Taj Mahal to the quarry from which its marble was taken. A characteristic of his genius was a susceptibility to suggestions wherever found. Indeed, suggestions of theme and treatment were integral parts of the work he did for Johnson and Thomson; yet no poet was ever more generous in praise of his forerunners and

contemporaries than Burns. Thomson, Shenstone, Gray, Pope, Steele, Beattie, are all mentioned in terms of highest commendation; and, though he had little to learn from Fergusson and less from Ramsay he places both on the very summit of Parnassus. Let the source-hunters work their will in making him out a plagiarist; the all-sufficient answer is that everything that passed through the alembic of his mind emerged a new creation, bearing the hall-mark of *his* genius and none other. He revered the memory of Fergusson, whose grave was one of the first places of interest he visited on his arrival in Edinburgh. He erected a tombstone over his remains in the Canongate Churchyard at his own expense to mark the "neglected spot" where he was laid to rest.

By the beginning of the Summer of 1787, the Poet, for the previous five months, had led the life of a leisured gentleman in Edinburgh. About the end of April his new edition was published, the demand for which so far exceeded calculation that a second issue was deemed necessary; and a third edition was published concurrently in London. Creech sets down the total receipts at £1100, out of which Burns was paid a sum estimated by Nicol at £600, by Gilbert Burns at £500, and by the Poet himself at £440 or £450,

including the £100 he received for the copyright. Burns was proverbially careless in money matters; his estimate may therefore be based on the balance remaining after all expenses of living in Edinburgh and the cost of his pleasure tours had been deducted.

He had considerable difficulty in settling with Creech, who kept him hanging about Edinburgh from August 1787 to April 1788, presumably advancing sums to account,[1] and it was not till February 1789 that a final settlement, not altogether satisfactory to the Poet, was agreed upon. Though the idea of emigration was still present in his mind, the offer by Mr. Miller of a choice of farms on his estate at Dalswinton again directed his thoughts to the plough as the only means of earning a living at his command. When his aim in life had so far been brought to fruition, he had experienced the "bliss o'ermatching Potosi's mine," as Coila had predicted, only to find it but poor fuel wherewith to keep the pot boiling. Looking to the future in the light of the bitter past, he saw nothing before him but a return to the "half mad, half fed, half sarkit" days at Mossgiel,

[1] The copyright (£100) and some subscriptions were paid direct to Burns, and he also received moneys for copies sold by himself or his friends.

with hope extinguished by the long-expected eclipse of the "nine days' wonder" which had rescued him from obscurity. His hopes of securing an Excise appointment were as far from realisation as ever, so he reluctantly accepted the only alternative, and set out with Ainslie on a Border tour which combined pleasure with the business of ascertaining his prospects of success on the soil of Dalswinton. After a week spent in Dumfries, part of which was devoted to the inspection of Mr. Miller's farms, he reached Mauchline on 9th June, after an absence extending over the fateful six months which had witnessed the miraculous change in his worldly prospects.

The worship of the risen sun demands no exercise of faith, and with the multitude who walk by sight nothing is so successful as success. Burns had little to learn from proverbial philosophy; his mental masculinity intuitively discounted his *éclatant* reception at Mauchline at its proper value. "The stateliness of the patricians of Edinburgh," he writes to Nicol, "and the civility of my plebeian brethren (who perhaps formerly eyed me askance) since I returned home, have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species." More suggestive is this to Smith—"If anything had been wanting to disgust me

completely at Armour's family, their mean, servile compliance would have done it." Compliance with what? In the eye of the law, Burns and Jean were husband and wife. Two courses were open to the Armours—to maintain their former attitude and shut their door in his face, or make a clean breast of it to Mr. Auld and have the irregular marriage confirmed, as dire necessity compelled a twelvemonth later. They chose neither, and their culpable want of forethought met with its reward in the troubles and complications which followed.

After a brief stay in Mauchline, he set out on a short journey to the West Highlands, returning by way of Loch Lomond, Dumbarton and Glasgow.[1] On 25th July, he presided as Deputy Master at a meeting of the Masonic Lodge at Mauchline, at which Professor Dugald Stewart, and Claude Alexander of Ballochmyle were admitted members, and by the beginning of August he was back in Edinburgh. Towards the end of that month, he went on a Northern tour through Stirling, Perth, and Inverness, accompanied by William Nicol,[2] returning by the East coast *via* Kinross

[1] There is a tradition that he visited Greenock, and interviewed Highland Mary's mother, who resided and died there at an advanced age. There is no recorded corroboration of this.

[2] Nicol was a man of ability and sound scholarship, but his manners were boorish, and his temper violent and ungovernable.

and Queensferry, to Edinburgh, where he arrived on 16th September. He kept a diary of these excursions, the entries in which have a special value as indicators to the fame he had achieved amongst his countrymen. Everywhere he was received as a man of distinction, the nobility and gentry resident in the localities traversed, almost without exception paying him the most marked attention. Jedburgh, Dumbarton, and Dumfries conferred on him the freedom of their burghs, and he was made a Royal Arch Mason by the Brethren of St. Abb's, Berwick. At Blair Athol he was entertained right royally by the Duke and Duchess, amongst the guests invited to meet him being General Murray, Sir William Murray of Ochtertyre, and Graham of Fintry, who afterwards proved such a staunch friend of the poet. The Duke and Duchess of Gordon showed themselves equally desirous to do him

Even in that age of hard drinking, he gained an unenviable notoriety for intemperance, and the influence of such a companionship was obviously the reverse of beneficial to Burns. Mrs. Dunlop warned Burns against "the schoolmaster who, the world says, has already damned you as an author, and now well nigh killed you as a man." Clarinda also refers to his "intimacy with a certain famous, or rather infamous, man in town." Nicol quarrelled with the Rector of the High School, and started an educational establishment of his own. His wife was Janet Cairns, sister of "the laird of Torr," whose dowry purchased the small estate of Laggan, of which Burns playfully designates Nicol "the illustrious lord."

honour, but his visit was shortened by the ill-temper of Nicol who considered himself slighted by being left alone at the inn.

These tours did not inspire his Muse to any great extent, but to say that Burns was not impressed by romantic scenery is to deny his powers of picturesque description manifested in such masterly style whenever fitting occasion called them forth. It is the fact, however, that almost every line he wrote bears witness that the living denizens of field and forest bulked more largely in his poetic vision than the landscape; the smoke from the lonely cot had more charms for him than the drifting clouds on the mountain tops. Amongst the productions of this holiday time may be mentioned the first version of *Ye Banks and Braes*, *M'Pherson's Farewell*, *Birks of Aberfeldy*, *Bruar Water*, *The Fall of Foyers*, *Blythe was She*, and the unlucky inscription on the window-pane at Stirling.[1] He also wrote an epistle in the Vernacular to Nicol from Carlisle—so strained and laboured in execution that it stands as proof the most surprising that a prose exercise of any kind seriously affected the natural flow of " the only words in the only order."

[1] When about to be nominated for an Excise appointment he says he " was questioned like a child about his matters, and blamed and schooled for his inscription on the Stirling window," by some one in authority.

After another month of dawdling in the city awaiting Creech's long-promised accounting, he accompanied Dr. Adair on a visit to Gavin Hamilton's relatives at Harvieston, drawn thither by the attraction of Margaret Chalmers and her cousin Charlotte Hamilton, to whom he had formerly paid his respects by breaking his journey at Stirling.[1] Before returning to Edinburgh, he proceeded to the Ochtertyres in Strathearn and on Teith, where he was hospitably entertained by Mr. Ramsay and Sir Wm. Murray, respective lairds thereof, his object in all likelihood being the securing of Sir William's good offices with Graham of Fintry, who was his cousin-german and an influential member of the Board of Excise. On 20th October he was again in Edinburgh with the intention of proceeding to Ayrshire to obtain the advice of his friends on his proposed farming venture. But Creech or the Fates willed it otherwise. The poet keenly resented the delays which again and again upset his plans by preventing his leaving Edinburgh, but he was helpless.[2]

[1] Margaret Chalmers was one of his special divinities. He corresponded with her, and according to Thomas Campbell, the poet, who had the information from the lady herself, he made proposals of marriage to her. She married Lewis Hay, an Edinburgh banker, in December 1788, and died, a widow, at Pau, in France, in 1843.

[2] Burns's letters of sharp remonstrance to Creech, of which Cromek evidently had intimate knowledge, have never been

The reprehensible procrastination of Creech at this juncture is most regrettable, for had the poet been enabled to carry out the time-table arrangements he had made, the Clarinda affair would never have had a beginning.

Amongst the poet's Edinburgh admirers was a Miss Nimmo, a sedate, sensible woman, and intimate friend of Margaret Chalmers, at whose house he was a frequent visitor. On one of these occasions, a Mrs. MacLehose was present by her own urgent request to make the acquaintance of the bard whose poems had given her supreme delight. The acquaintance ripened so rapidly that in eight or ten days, the poet was under engagement to visit her in her own house. An accident, through the drunken carelessness of a coachman, confined him to the house with a bruised knee for a period of six weeks, and prevented him from keeping the appointment. Following his note of explanation, there ensued a correspondence which should have been allowed to remain in the seclusion which alone becomes it, but which was published in Glasgow through

made public. It is said they were destroyed, on advice given by Margaret Chalmers (Mrs. Hay), when Dr. Currie was engaged on the Liverpool edition. Maria Riddell refers to Creech's failings in the frankest terms in her letters to Dr. Currie. (See *Burns Chronicle*, No. XXX., 1921.)

a gross breach of faith after Dr. Currie had rejected it.[1]

The inflated language and lofty heroics of love epistles in any case appear bombastic comedy in the eyes of those for whom they are not intended, and this correspondence between Burns and Clarinda is no exception. Worse than that, it exhibits Burns in a light which distorts his features almost beyond recognition. In the initiatory letters, he divests himself of reality, the chief feature of his personality and genius; and indeed all through, this unwonted attitude is painfully apparent. He is not the personage he affects to be; he purposely assumes the *rôle* of the lover, struts the stage in the robes of Romeo, and grievously overdoes the part with frothy rant which occasionally comes perilously near commonplace cant.[2] As with Elison

[1] Currie did not peruse the text of the letters; Mrs. MacLehose refused to allow them out of her sight, but, on the return of her own, she agreed to give John Syme a reading of them in her house in Edinburgh. She also sent extracts from them to Maria Riddell, who passed them on to Dr. Currie. She steadfastly refused all applications for their publication to the day of her death. Her grandson published them in 1843, by which date several of them were damaged or lost.

[2] In the Glenriddel MSS. he appends this note to one of the letters which may be taken as applicable to more of them: "The foregoing was the fustian rant of enthusiastic youth." He was thirty-four when he penned the letter referred to—another illustration of his proneness to mystification of dates in affairs of this kind.

Begbie, he is showing off his parts, but in more elaborate style. An educated, accomplished woman—"a thing altogether new to him," he tells us—had thrown down the gauntlet, and he had picked it up in his impulsive way without ever a thought to the consequences. He had pitted himself against the most exalted and learned men in Edinburgh (between whom and the "men of rustic life" he recognised no difference) and vindicated the rights of sense and worth; nor did he ever lose an opportunity of demonstrating that he could ruffle it with the most gallant of cavaliers where ladies fair were concerned. This frame of mind, begotten of his inborn adoration of the sex and his proneness to jealousy of rank and fortune, was habitual; "To be overtopped in anything else, I can bear"; he wrote to Clarinda, "but in the lists of generous love, I defy all mankind."

There was but one line of level in the social fabric, and all through his life he strove to establish it by the weight of his own example. There is a marked dissimilarity between his attitude towards men of exalted position and that which he assumed towards women of the same order, whom he consistently regarded as component units of the weaker sex, with the same claims on the protection of the

stronger as their humbler sisters. An illustration in point will be found in one of his letters to Smith (literally interpreted by Stevenson and Henley to Burns's disadvantage), in which he refers to a lady of " elegant manners in the train of some great folks (whom Smith knew) and who had seen the politest quarters in Europe," who " flew off in a tangent of female dignity " when he hinted at a stronger feeling than friendship, and wrote him an answer " measuring out very completely what an immense way he had to travel before he could reach the climate of her favour." Then, assuming the *rôle* of a swaggering Lothario, he confidentially condescends on the *modus operandi*, when the miracle-working " finesse " of Rab Mossgiel was called into action. " But I am an old hawk at the sport, and wrote her such a cool, deliberate, prudent reply as brought my bird from her aerial towerings pop down at my foot, like Corporal Trim's hat." [1] The lady is not named, but Margaret Chalmers alone fits the frame of the picture. What was here " measured out " to him is obviously the inequality of their social positions. His

[1] In his letter to Arnot, of Dalquhatswood, formerly referred to, occurs this passage,—" As I am an old fox, I shall give them (the Armours) dodging and doubling for it "—the plain prose of which is that he took refuge with his relations at Old Rome Forest.

" prudent reply " has not come down to us ; all we know is that she drew the line firmly at friendship, and little more than a year afterwards married a man of means. The inuendoes read into Burns's allegorical language have no justification whatever with a woman like Margaret Chalmers, nor any other lady of his acquaintance who answers the description. Nor can any meaning of the kind be read into the Clarinda correspondence. In this instance, the bird was of a different feather and came to hand ; when the " old hawk " did stoop it was to display his grace and agility on the wing.

Mrs. MacLehose, *née* Agnes Craig, born in the same year as the poet, was the daughter of a medical practitioner in Glasgow, and cousin of Lord Craig, one of the Lords of Session. She was married at the age of seventeen to James MacLehose, a lawyer by profession and member of a good Glasgow family, but himself an unprincipled man of dissolute habits, who, after exhausting the charity and patience of his friends, deserted her and his children after a separation, and emigrated to the West Indies where he secured a professional appointment in Jamaica.[1]

[1]For thirty-two years he neglected his wife and family, contributing nothing to their maintenance. When he died, in 1812, his widow successfully claimed a few hundred pounds which happened to be in a London banker's hands at that date.

When Burns made her acquaintance, she was living in Edinburgh with two boys of the marriage, on a small annuity left by her father, supplemented by an allowance from Lord Craig. She was a woman of overflowing sentiment and lively affections—young, handsome, vivacious, well-endowed intellectually, and giving to stringing pleasing rhymes together.[1] She professed to be a sound Calvinist, except on a few knotty points, she naïvely confesses, which she "never meddled with"; whatever her religious beliefs, she was "kirky" to a degree and addicted to pet-pastorism. But her walk and conversation were consistently governed by right principles and deep religious convictions. She had all a woman's dread of loosening the tongue of scandal by occasional relaxations of the proprieties, but there is nothing in her relations with Burns save a few pardonable indiscretions to which the censorious can take reasonable exception. That she played with fire for nearly three months and escaped unscathed is certification sufficient of her high sense of duty and honour in the delicate position in which she was placed. She halted and hesitated, yet all the while she was

[1] She was fond of company and much given to social enjoyments of all kinds, and this displeased her husband whose family took his part in the early stages of the estrangement.

consciously drifting from hero-worship of the poet to blind passionate love of the man. The front of her offending is her vacillating responses to the Poet's advances; her ready condonation of his transgressions, and callous indifference to the fate of Jean Armour; above all, her fixed determination at all hazards to retain her hold on Burns till the obstacle of her husband was removed.[1]

As for Burns, his eternal propensity to fall in love, notwithstanding his recent experience of "the humiliations to which it exposes its victims," again produced its bitter fruits. He soon found himself compelled to choose between two "different species of error and misconduct"—a wedded wife in Mauchline and an attachment to a "grass widow," the wife of another man, in Edinburgh. As the correspondence progressed —such a jumble of love and religion was surely never penned—he began to discard his stage trappings; and ere his six weeks' imprisonment was ended, enraptured by the novelty of impassioned responses in his own vein, he had "battered" himself into a strong affection for the woman whom he addressed at first because "he had nothing else to do."[2] The sincerity of his

[1] He outlived Burns by sixteen years.

[2] Her favourite theme was religion, and that gave Burns his cue. He strove to please, as he did with all his correspondents, and employed his pen on what he was sure would interest her.

later declarations, however, cannot be doubted. There is no affectation of feeling in that song-gem, *My Nannie's Awa*: the condensed passion of *Ae Fond Kiss* has never been surpassed in lyrical composition. Like his feathered favourite, the mellow mavis, he sings most sweetly and clearly after the thunderstorm, and through the purified atmosphere all things unlovely are seen in a kindlier light.

How it all ended we have already narrated.[1] In replying to her denunciations of his conduct, he indignantly resented being accused of "perfidious treachery" and written down "a villain," but he does not improve his case by conveying the impression that Jean Armour might have been sacrificed had Clarinda been free to marry him.[2] Both were equally in the wrong, with this balance on Burns's side of the account, that he may have salved his conscience with doubts of the binding nature of his marriage, while hers

In one letter he gave her a brief summary of his own creed, broad enough in expression to evade all doctrinal discussions. There are also passages here and there in Sylvander's letters not inferior in any respect to the best of his prose compositions, which lie embedded like grains of wheat in whole bushels of chaff.

[1] The correspondence extended over a period of 74 days—from 6th December, 1787, to 18th February, 1788.

[2] When he publicly acknowledged Jean to be his wife, Clarinda, in her disappointment, threatened to publish his letters to her, but second thoughts convinced her of the folly of such a course.

was an unquestionable, insurmountable fact. They met only once after the confirmation of his marriage, though they corresponded in an intermittent way down to the middle of 1794. In 1792 she went out to Jamaica to rejoin her husband, where the reception that awaited her was of such a repulsive nature that she returned in the same vessel. She died in Edinburgh in 1841, having outlived Burns by forty-five years.

Events moved quickly in the early months of 1788. On 13th March, after another visit to Dalswinton accompanied by "gude auld Glen," his own and his father's friend, he signed the lease of Ellisland with much misgiving. A day or two later he received intimation that he had been nominated for the long-expected Excise appointment; on the 24th he took farewell of Edinburgh, and was in Mauchline by the 31st, to receive a course of six weeks' instruction in the technicalities of gauging from James Findlay, Excise officer in Tarbolton; after which he was eligible for an appointment to a district, which eventually was fixed in that part of Dumfriesshire in which Ellisland was situated. But he did not enter on his duties till August, 1789. His motive for seeking this appointment he confided to Dr. Moore—the securing, if the worst came to the worst, of an assured means of liveli-

hood, a further inducement being the leisure attendant on the higher posts of the service which he intended to consecrate to the bent of his genius. Another reason advanced to Graham of Fintry was, that the roving life of a gauger would facilitate the collection of material for a Scottish drama he had then in contemplation. Never was his aim in life so clearly revealed to him as in the interval between his Edinburgh experience and his entrance on his Excise duties at Ellisland. A new spirit of emulation was stirred; he conceived loftier flights than he had yet attempted; and he composed disjointed fragments and sketches to be afterwards woven into a connected whole.[1] The projected drama may have been suggested by Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*, or by a desire to add to his laurels by emulating the achievements of the English play-wrights in the more regular dramatic form which would have placed his *Jolly Beggars* on a level with the best of their productions.

These aspirations proved to be but vain

[1] The "Poet's Progress," an intention never accomplished. In a letter addressed to Lady Elizabeth Cunningham (January, 1789) occurs this passage: "I have a hundred different poetic plans, pastoral, georgic, dramatic, etc., floating in the regions of fancy, somewhere between purpose and resolve." He wrote to Bishop Geddes in the same strain. In 1790 he requested Peter Hill to procure for him copies of the English dramatists, and also Molière, in the original.

gropings after the impossible. The only outcome was *Tam o' Shanter* (cast in the form of a dramatic narrative), which owes its origin to a chance meeting with Francis Grose, the antiquary.[1] He could not lead three lives concurrently and attain success in them all. One of them he relinquished after a three years' contest with the "riddlings of creation" at Ellisland, leaving the struggle for supremacy between the poet and the exciseman. It required no prophet to foresee the result of this duality of aim. Had the exciseman been eliminated, his future might have been more beneficently influenced by a return to the congenial atmosphere which had worked such wonders at Mossgiel, despite all drawbacks. Thomas Carlyle, keenly appreciative and brimful of sympathy with his subject as he was, declares his conviction that the paucity of effort to accomplish great things in his later years proceeded from Burns's chronic inability to apprehend his true aim in life, intensified by a constitutional disinclination to attain that aim by steady and sustained application. This must be read in the spirit which pervades the whole of the Carlyle essay, in which the disadvantages

[1] He wrote prologues for his actor friends in Dumfries theatre, but nothing else intended for the stage. In one of her letters Mrs. Dunlop rallies him on a resolution he had expressed to one of her friends that he would write no more for fourteen years.

and hardships of Burns's life are set forth with the convincing logic of personal knowledge. Carlyle had learned in the same hard school the repressive influence of " chill penury " on struggling genius—an influence which, in Burns's case, narrowed his outlook to his sordid surroundings, amid which, as if bereft of mental vision, he brooded over " the great misfortune of his life " in the want of a visible means of escape from the drudgery and poverty to which he believed himself hopelessly doomed. At Mossgiel, a Cyclops still blindly groping round the cave, he gave free play to the impulses of his genius and found the way out. The work accomplished there testifies to his aptitude for application when stern necessity called upon him to choose at the parting of the ways. The incentive to escape from his fate, ever present in his mind, became overpowering by the added weight of an accumulation of misfortunes, and energetic exercise of his gifts immediately followed.

But he set his face like flint against literature as a profession ; he regarded with a repugnance akin to horror every proposal of stipulated recompense for the fruits of his genius. The proposals made to him by the proprietors of the *Morning Chronicle*—a Whig organ published in London—he refused to entertain, though the offered

remuneration, on the authority of Sir Walter Scott, was five guineas per week. His career as a Government official would assuredly have been jeopardised by any connection with the political press, but we are inclined to believe that his refusal proceeded from his constitutional aversion to anything which savoured of hire for literary labour. He accepted the profits on his published works from Wilson and Creech as the legitimate earnings of an author, but had either made advances to engage his services on specified terms, he would have treated their proposals in the same way. Verse-making was outside the definition of work which necessity had always compelled; he clung to the plough as a means of subsistence till he found it to be utterly hopeless. Hence his solicitude, after his evanescent Edinburgh success, to lessen risk in the future by rendering himself independent of both the pen and the plough. The calling he chose, or rather was compelled to choose, was the worst imaginable for a man of his temperament and social instincts. The life of an exciseman was then a most arduous and exacting one, demanding all his time and energies, and leaving very little leisure.[1]

[1] Burns's district comprised the parishes of Kirkconnel, Sanquhar, Glencairn, Dunscore, Durisdeer, Morton, Penpont, Keir, Tynron, Closeburn, Holywood, and possibly Kirkmahoe (*Burns Chronicle*, No. IX., 1900).

On horseback the most of his time, he was exposed to all sorts of weather and to the temptations, every day and all day, of the "savage hospitality" then dispensed everywhere —a kind of life which did not tend to the formation of regular domestic habits. What time he had at his disposal was devoted to his contributions to Johnson and Thomson, the desultory nature of the work being in accord with the intermittent opportunities he had of applying himself to it.

Other reasons were operating to deter him from any attempt to follow up his first success. The novelty of the "ploughman poet" had worn off, which effectually barred a repetition of the sensation of his first appearance, the material fruits of which were a short period of "idleness and dissipation" in Edinburgh, a few hundred pounds of capital, and the lease of a farm, the financial success of which was extremely problematical. True, he had been ushered into fame, but the support of a wife and family demanded something more substantial. All his time was so fully taken up by his official duties and the oversight of his farm that we may well wonder that his neglected Muse did not deteriorate through disuse. As time passed, his memories of the lionising in Edinburgh could not be con-

ducive to a contented frame of mind contrasted with the gin-horse life he was now leading. Carlyle, indeed, does not scruple to say that these memories embittered the whole of his after life. In the sunshine of success, his words were treasured and his opinions deferred to, as one of the most virile thinkers of the age; when his sun passed the meridian and he had taken service under the mandarins of the Excise, he was told his place was to gauge barrels and leave all thinking to his superiors.

How the official fetters chafed his fiery soul we can guess from his impetuous behaviour on the few occasions he did break out and gave his enemies cause to rejoice. When their sinister whisperings reached the ear of the Excise Board, he was thrown into a state of the greatest trepidation. His Excise appointment he repeatedly refers to as his "sheet anchor in this world," and the burden of his first letter of explanation to Graham of Fintry resolved itself into an impassioned appeal on behalf of his helpless wife and children. This was followed by the eloquent defence which confounded his traducers and completely exonerated him. But the first letter clearly shows that what was uppermost in his mind was the dread of a return to the toil and penury of his youth. Rather than

face that contingency, he was prepared to make any sacrifice, and the sacrifice demanded was the effacement of himself as a leader of thought, and henceforth to think, speak, and act as became a salaried official—a compulsory aim for the rest of his life which permanently eclipsed all others. Muzzled and puzzled by restrictions without and promptings within, he steered his course as best he could, at times plunged in deepest melancholy, a soured and disappointed man, conscious of his powers and fiercely resentful of the "cursed necessity" which reduced them to impotence.

When Byron's sun was eclipsed at its meridian by the scandals associated with his separation from his wife, and censorious tongues had driven him into exile from which he never returned, his sensual excesses in Italy ruined his health and brought to a premature close his brilliant and unhappy career. Macaulay expresses his belief that there was "an unsound part in his mind" from the beginning, but how much of his conduct was due to this congenital imperfection and how much to disappointed ambition or resentment against real or supposed wrong who can tell? On the psychological conditions conducive to genius we cannot dogmatise; all that can be said is that they are

abnormal, and therefore cannot be gauged by the ordinary standard. Had Byron in his later years been compelled, like Burns, to earn his living, it is questionable if his literary output, in any form, would have equalled that of Burns in Dumfries. Burns manfully faced the "cursed necessity," and by faithful discharge of his duties, gained both reputation and promotion as a most efficient officer, besides contriving to create in his odd moments a wealth of lyrical poetry which stands without a rival in national literature. Whether his genius was of the order in which the sustained intensive thought necessary for the drama finds expression is a moot question which cannot now be convincingly answered either way. He had achieved immortal fame by what he had already accomplished, and it is conjectural whether he could have materially added to it by the realisation of these later and more ambitious projects.

With the recorded facts for such a length of time before the reading public, it is more than surprising that the tradition of neglect and want of appreciation by his contemporaries still survives, notwithstanding the accessibility of overwhelming proof to the contrary.

CHAPTER IV

ELLISLAND AND DUMFRIES

The lease of Ellisland began to run at Whitsunday, 1788, but Burns did not take up his residence there till about the middle of June. A new steading had to be erected, for which, according to custom, he carted the material, finding temporary accommodation at the Isle, a cot-house situated about a mile further down the Nith.[1] Jean did not join him till December. During the interim she put herself under the tuition of Burns's mother and sisters at Mossgiel to qualify herself for the discharge of her duties as a farmer's wife. Burns disposed of his lease to his landlord at Martinmas, 1791, so that his tenancy of Ellisland continued only for three and a half years. His misgivings as to the financial success of the undertaking appear to have arisen from a fear that his capital was not sufficient for the reclaiming of the soil which the former tenant

[1] A recently recovered letter makes it appear that he latterly rented a vacant house in the locality.

had left in bad condition. He had lent his brother nearly one-half of all he was worth to save the family at Mossgiel from ruin, and this left him, he informed Glencairn, little more than £200 to stock and work his own farm till it began to yield a return. He was accounted the successful member of the family, and most generously did he respond to all the demands made upon him in that capacity. He assisted his younger brother, William (a journeyman saddler who died at an early age in London) with money and all the influence he could command; he settled an annuity on his mother; and he befriended his cousins—the children of "poor uncle Robert"—by taking the youngest girl, Fanny, into his own service,[1] and giving her brothers, John and William, a start in life.

But ere his third harvest was reaped, an automatic rise of £20 in the rent and the constant drain upon his resources without adequate return compelled him to cut his loss and fall back on his "sheet anchor," the Excise appointment, as the only alternative now left him. For the first fourteen months of the lease, he was farmer most of the time and poet occasionally; after that, was

[1] She married a brother of Jean Armour, who went to London and was so successful in business that he retired with a competence.

added the work of a district exciseman ; and this triple strain upon his energies continued till he rid himself of the farm and removed to Dumfries—not empty-handed, as Allan Cunningham would have us believe, yet with some proportion of his modest capital left behind in the stony soil of Ellisland.[1] He did not relinquish the plough without due deliberation. After nearly two years experience of official work, he found that the conviction of smugglers was a better paying business than farming ; and there was the further inducement of a pension at the end of his service.

His initial salary was £50 per annum, out of which he had to provide the upkeep of a horse. This sum must be placed in the proper perspective of money values before computing its adequacy as a living wage in those days. At the same date, the average emoluments of the parish school-masters of Scotland were

[1] Allan Cunningham draws so largely on his lively imagination that it is next to impossible to distinguish between the real and the imaginary in his narrative. Mrs. Burns flatly contradicts him here, and so does Burns himself, who informed Mrs. Dunlop that he expected to lose £100, but matters turned out better than he anticipated. In other instances Cunningham contradicts himself. His unblushing confession to the Cromek forgeries disqualifies him as a credible witness. His account of Burns's funeral is pure fiction. He says the day was a fine one without a drop of rain, whereas in the Grierson Diary it is described as showery in the forenoon with a wet evening and night.

about £20 per annum, many of them having to provide a dwelling-house out of this pittance, and the average stipend of Scottish clergymen in the middle of the eighteenth century was considerably under £40. This £50 was increased to £70, and latterly to £85 as Port Officer in Dumfries, which, being a foot walk, relieved him of the expense of keeping a horse.[1] Dr. Currie and his followers assert that a salary of £70 was the extreme limit of Burns's income in his later years. This falls far short of the truth. In addition to the fixed salary, the excisemen of that day were entitled to half the money value of all contraband goods they seized, and also the half of all fines inflicted upon smugglers. As almost every article of domestic consumption was then subject to Excise duties, it naturally followed that fines and seizures formed a considerable part of an exciseman's emoluments.[2] In fact he was considered a very slack officer who did

[1] A Port Division, he informed Mrs. Dunlop, "is £20 a year more than any other Division, besides as much rum and brandy as would easily supply an ordinary family." Mr. Findlater, a reliable authority, writing to the *Glasgow Courier*, in 1834, states that his salary was latterly raised from £70 to £85.

[2] Auctions, bricks and tiles, beer, candles, coaches, cocoa-nuts, coffee, cider, perry, verjuice, glass, hops, hides and skins, malt, mead, paper, printed calico and silk goods, pepper, soap, British spirits, foreign spirits, starch, salt, stone bottles, sweets, tea, tobacco, snuff, wine, and wire were all subject to Excise duties.

not make as much out of his seizures and fines as his salary amounted to. In one day Burns got a decreet against a smuggler for a sum between £50 and £60, and he mentions in another letter the seizure of a large quantity of tobacco.

Mr. James MacFadzean, of the Excise service, latterly supervisor at Glasgow (the highest post in the Scotch service), when stationed at Somerset House in 1857, recovered the Excise records in use when Burns was an official in Dumfries, from which he took extracts, proving that Burns's total emoluments when stationed in that town were nearer £200 than £150 per annum. Again comparing money values, it will be seen that Burns was in comfortable circumstances after his removal from Ellisland. He was the leading actor in the capture of the brig "Rosamund,"[1] in 1792, and, as vessel and cargo were sold by auction, his share of the prize money must have been considerable. In the *Burns Chronicle* (No. VII., 1898) appeared a very informative article on Burns's excise duties and emoluments, by the late R. W.

[1] He purchased the carronades of this vessel and forwarded them to the French Revolutionists, thereby exposing himself to misrepresentation. Britain and France were not at war at that date, nor had the excesses of the Revolution alienated British sympathy.

MacFadzean, of the Excise Office, Ayr (son of the foresaid James), in which, referring to the discoveries made by his father, he says, "To anyone who carefully considers all these circumstances, it must be evident that the gross emoluments of his (Burns's) office must have come near £200." [1]

Burns was a man of luxurious tastes in many ways. "Coin his pouches widna bide in," consequently we find him occasionally borrowing small sums from his friends between quarter-day and quarter-day which were all punctually refunded. The war with France seriously affected his emoluments derived from fines and seizures in the years immediately preceding his death. He informed William Stewart, in a letter (January, 1795) that fully "a third part of his income was lopt off" by the decrease in the volume of foreign trade. His letters to

[1] We have repeatedly conversed with Mr. R. W. MacFadzean on the subject of the information rescued by his father before the regrettable destruction of the old Edinburgh records, in accordance with a regulation fixing a limit to their preservation. His father's notes were then in his possession, regarding which he expressed his intention to present them to a public institution for preservation. He died suddenly before this intention was carried into effect, but the documents presumably are still in the hands of his heirs. Dr. James Adams, of Glasgow, perused them, and published extracts from them in the *Glasgow Mail* (April 16th and 20th, 1895), bearing on the Poet's official career in Dumfries.

James Clarke, teacher, Forfar, have been misunderstood by some writers. He advanced money to Clarke when in Moffat, and the letters referred to were reminders for repayment. But what, it may be asked, can be said of his last despairing cry, "save me from the horrors of a jail!"

About eighteen years ago, the writer discovered in Dumfries the whole documents connected with the trust estate of the Poet, the members of which took upon themselves the realisation of his effects for behoof of the widow and family. They are official documents in the hand of William Thomson, a local lawyer who acted for the Burns family when Currie's edition was in course of preparation.[1] They are countersigned by Gilbert and Mrs. Burns, and are now deposited in the Burns Museum, Kilmarnock. From these documents (ten in number) we learn that the total amount of Burns's debts at the date of his death was £14 15s., and the balance of Gilbert's loan stood at £183 16s. 7d. His furniture was not valued, but his books alone were estimated at a sum of £90. The documents also inform us that the Poet paid

[1] He was appointed agent for the Trustees by the Court of Session. The Trustees were: Mr. Miller, of Dalswinton; Mr. McMurdo, of Drumlanrig; Dr. Maxwell; Mr. J. Syme; and Mr. Alexander Cunningham, Edinburgh.

his brother regularly for the boarding, clothing, and education of "dear bought Bess"; and that he allowed his mother an annuity of £5, also paid regularly every year. A man who acted so generously and left a sum of £180 (equal to close on £400 of modern money) exclusive of movable effects, cannot be said to have died in absolute poverty.

His hysterical appeals to George Thomson and his cousin at Montrose were the expiring cry of his independent spirit on the point of being set free from the weak tabernacle of clay. He did not require to go so far afield, for scores of his Dumfries friends would have paid the draper's bill which so discomposed him, and which had been forwarded in the ordinary course of business with no threat, nor the slightest approach to it, of legal proceedings.[1] This account—it was for his Volunteer uniform—must have been paid on presentation, for it does not appear in the posthumous list of his debts.[2] The remittances from Thomson and his cousin arrived too late,

[1] The reason for presentation of the account at that inopportune time by the agent of the drapery firm is said to have been a dissolution of partnership. (See McDowall's *History of Dumfries*, p. 669.)

[2] See *Burns Chronicle* (No. IX.) and *Glasgow Herald*, December 11th, 1899.

and were cashed by Mrs. Burns, after the necessary legal steps, several weeks after the Poet's death. Gilbert's loan was not repaid till 1820, and this may have given rise to the fiction, as baseless as the rest of them, that Burns left his wife and family in extreme poverty and destitution.

The first eighteen months of residence in Ellisland did not admit of much leisure for poetic composition, but though the output was limited, the quality was generally of the best. The most notable compositions are, *Of a' the Airts*, his honeymoon tribute to Jean; the world-renowned *Auld Langsyne*; *Gae bring to me a pint o' Wine*; *Verses written in Friars' Carse Hermitage*; *Address to the Toothache*; *The Kirk's Alarm*; *Willie Brewed*; *The Whistle*; and *To Mary in Heaven*.[1] To the latter part of the Ellisland period belong *Tam o' Shanter*; *The Five Carlines*; *Elegy on Captain Mathew Henderson*; *Lament of Mary, Queen of Scots*; *Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn*; *Ae Fond Kiss*; *The Song of Death*; *John Anderson, my Jo*;

[1] Lockhart, improving upon Cromek, recounts in fuller detail the romantic story of the composition of this song in the stack-yard at Ellisland, which looks suspiciously like an embroidered prose version of the text, quite in the Cromek manner. "Mariolatry" of this kind is harmless, and need not be too critically enquired into.

and the final version of *Ye Banks and Braes*, which has been erroneously assigned by some authorities to the period of his sojourn in Edinburgh.

At Ellisland he made the acquaintance of Robert Riddell of Glenriddell, an estimable man of antiquarian and literary tastes, whose mansion-house, Friar's Carse, was in close proximity to Ellisland. Burns was given free access to a detached rustic building in the grounds, called the Hermitage, to whose seclusion he occasionally retired when in poetic mood. The acquaintance ripened into intimate friendship, which continued uninterrupted till the poet's quarrel with Riddell's brother, Walter, and his sister-in-law, Maria, who resided at Woodley Park, in the neighbourhood of Dumfries.[1] Walter Rid-

[1] In a copy of *Johnson's Museum*, in which blank leaves were bound up, Burns, at Robert Riddell's request, entered explanatory notes on the songs. This is known as "The Interleaved Glenriddel MS.," to which we have referred in a former note. It is now in the possession of Mr. John Gribbel, of Philadelphia.

Burns also wrote out, partly in his own hand and partly in that of an amanuensis, two volumes of his unpublished pieces, also at Riddell's request. After that gentleman's death, Burns regained possession of the first volume (the second was unfinished and in his own hands), and both were forwarded to Dr. Currie when he was engaged on the posthumous edition of the poet. They remained in the possession of the Currie family till 1853, when they were presented by Mrs. Currie, widow of Dr. Currie's son, to the Liverpool Athenæum Library, which body sold them, in 1913, to a London dealer. Eventually, they were purchased

dell was a man of a totally different stamp from his brother at Friars' Carse. He was a debauchee and a spendthrift, and his associates were men of like tastes and habits. Burns had such a poor opinion of him that one wonders why there was ever any appearance of friendship between them. The Poet appears to have been captivated by the accomplishments and literary tastes of Riddell's wife—the daughter of a Governor in the West Indies—with whom he had much in common; and he too often responded to invitations to dinner-parties which usually resolved themselves into drunken debauches. The immediate cause of the rupture is traceable to the brutalising effects of drink on a company of confirmed bacchanals, whose ideas of decorum, at the best, were perhaps not on a high level. Part of the horseplay on a certain evening was a disorderly stampede to the drawing-room, where they extinguished the lights. All were equally implicated in the outrage, yet only one man among them had the saving grace to apologise. Next day, Burns addressed a letter to the hostess "from the regions of Hell, amid the horrors of the damned," praying for

by Mr. John Gribbel, of Philadelphia, who generously presented them to the Scottish nation. These volumes are known as "The Glenriddell MSS."

forgiveness to alleviate his torments. "To the men of the company," he proceeds, "I will make no apology. Your husband, who insisted on my drinking more than I chose, has no right to blame me; and the other gentlemen were partakers of my guilt." The only reply vouchsafed to this moving proof of contrition was the cutting of his acquaintance on the public street. Burns naturally resented this contemptuous treatment and showed his resentment by writing several sharp-edged lampoons on the lady, in which her vanity and frivolity are dealt with in no tender fashion.

Burns has been taken to task for this by his censors, and judgment passed upon him, as if his conduct had neither justification nor excuse of any kind. By the very abjectness of his apology he singled himself out for punishment, which he might have escaped by following the example of his fellow-sinners and leaving the contemptible host—the "reptile Wat"—to square matters with all parties concerned as best he could. Recriminations went too far for a complete reconciliation,[1] which accounts for the lukewarmness here and there

[1] In February, 1796, Burns instructed George Thomson to charge the Riddells for their copies of his work as "neither of them deserved any kindness at his (Burns's) hands."

observable in Mrs. Riddell's tribute to the memory of Burns—written, be it observed, in the character of an intimate friend—which appeared in the *Dumfries Journal* a week or two after his death. Kirkpatrick Sharpe, who knew Maria Riddell in Dumfries and later on in Edinburgh, speaks of her, in one of his few Burns memoranda, in savagely severe terms, implying that she was one of the deteriorating influences on Burns's life in Dumfries.[1] His acidulous indictment is not borne out by anything which has found a place on the accredited record; still, there is reason for believing, from what we do know, that the Poet's intimacy at Woodley Park did not make altogether for good. The scornful rejection by his quondam friends of his proffered penitence, their ostentatious display of offended dignity, which soon spread amongst their flunkey following, more than all, the alienation of his Friars' Carse friends, thoroughly roused the "stubborn something" within him, and induced a defiant frame of mind towards the *bourgeois* element of Dumfries society which materially augmented the number of his enemies. Robert Riddell died unreconciled, in 1794, greatly to Burns's sorrow. His brother,

[1] See *Burns Chronicle*, No. XII., 1903. Mrs. Walter Riddell (Maria) died in 1812. She contracted a second marriage in 1808.

Walter, succeeded him in the Friars' Carse estate, but, being in pecuniary difficulties, both that property and his own were brought to the hammer a few months after his brother's death.

At Ellisland he formed more enduring friendships with John M'Murdo, Chamberlain to the Duke of Queensberry; William Stewart, factor on the Closeburn estate; Fergusson of Craigdarroch; Maxwell of Terraughty, and others; and he was on more or less intimate terms with most of the leading farmers in the surrounding district. In conjunction with Robert Riddell, he established a circulating library in the parish, in which he took a lively interest. He attended the Church at Dunscore, the incumbent of which, the Rev. Mr. Kirkpatrick, occasionally taxed his patience by the narrowness of his Calvinistic views, though he revered him for his consistent and exemplary life. After Jean joined him, he lived, as he jocularly wrote to a friend, a truly patriarchal life—attending to his flocks and herds, and begetting sons and daughters, with his face sedulously turned Zionward.

When he entered on his Excise duties, he soon became the most popular man in that part of the country. Wherever he went, his brilliant conversational powers made him a welcome guest; but

the hospitality forced upon him by his rustic admirers ill assorted with the irregular hours and meals incident to his vocation, and so serious inroads on the simplicity of the patriarchal life was the result. His frequent absences from home prevented in great measure his personal supervision of the farm operations, which accordingly were left very much in the care of hirelings. Dumfries was a convenient centre for his weekly rounds, and, when business led him there, he took up his quarters in the Globe Tavern, with whose host and hostess—Mr. and Mrs. Hyslop—he was on terms of close intimacy. This tavern is associated with the most grievous error of Burns's life. On 31st March, 1791, Anne Park, niece of Mrs. Hyslop and maid-servant in her employment, brought forth an illegitimate child of which Burns was the father. Attempts have been made by Allan Cunningham and others to extenuate this transgression of Burns, but all that need be said is that his loyal and faithful wife, who doubtless knew more than can ever now be known, took the child into her own care, and brought her up as a member of the family.[1]

[1] This child, Elizabeth Burns, whose mother died shortly after her birth, grew up a most worthy woman. She married Mr. Thomson, a discharged soldier, and resided in Pollokshaws till her death in 1873. Margaret, one of her daughters, became the wife of David Wingate, the collier poet.

This disconcerting event, it should be noted, did not affect his friendly relations with the Hyslops, nor does it appear to have given rise to much public comment.

Maria Riddell, referring to the birth of this child in one of her letters to Dr. Currie, says that Burns, discussing the matter with her, expressed "with much sensibility," his thankfulness for the forgiving spirit of his wife. That a discussion of the kind should have taken place at all appears strange in those modern days, and affords another proof that the ideas of propriety of conduct were very different then from what they are now. The nobility of mind displayed by Jean in the trying circumstances is the crowning proof that Burns never did a wiser thing than when he returned from Edinburgh to Mauchline and publicly acknowledged Jean Armour to be his lawful wedded wife. Margaret Chalmers, with the instinct of the capable and sensible woman she was, quickly recognised the kind of helpmate his worldly position and errant impulses required; and the sequel proved that she never did a kindlier action than when she led him to understand that an alliance with a woman of her order was not an assurance of that conjugal felicity which he imagined invariably accompanied the possession

of superior accomplishments and general compatibility of temperament.

R. L. Stevenson, in accordance with the peculiar views he entertained of Burns's marriage, affirms that "from the outset it was a marriage that had no root in nature." "Let her (Jean Armour)," he continues, "manage a farm with sense, let her voice rise to B natural all day long, she would still be a peasant to her lettered lord"—a pointed commentary on Mr. Henley's contention (then unwritten) that "first and last" Burns himself remained a typical peasant. In the correspondence already alluded to, Maria Riddell remarks that Burns always spoke of his wife "with a high tribute of respect and esteem." R. L. S. comes nearer the mark when he expresses doubt whether "any marriage would have tamed Burns" —a revelation of unsettled judgment which exonerates Jean from the implied responsibility he indirectly attaches to her for the relaxing of Burns's domestic habits after he removed to Dumfries.

During his stay in Ellisland, his daily routine and mode of life were similar to the use and wont of the average officer in the service. Brownhill Inn, the hostess of which was a sister of William Stewart, was a house of call, and in Closeburn he sometimes requisitioned the "woodnote wild"

of Kirsty Flint, in lieu of Jean's, when polishing the diction of his lyrics. There are plain signs of low spirits as well as occasional irritation at the "meddling interference" of his landlord observable in his correspondence during the last few months of his tenancy; but nothing suggestive of intemperance as the cause of his troubles. His sister, Agnes, who superintended the dairy for a time during Jean's absence at Mauchline, testifies to his general regularity of life; and the evidence of visitors, attracted by his fame to Ellisland, is to the same effect. Many of his old friends visited him there, amongst them Ramsay of Ochtertyre, Robert Ainslie, the son of Dr. Lawrie of Loudoun, and William Nicol and Allan Masterton when on annual holiday, besides a constant stream of strangers attracted by his fame. The leaving sale, which was an exceptionally good one, took place in August, 1791; and by the end of November he paid a last visit to Edinburgh. Clarinda, who was on the point of departing on her ill-starred voyage to Jamaica, was so far reconciled that Burns called upon her to bid her farewell, which event is supposed to be commemorated by *O May! thy morn was ne'er sae sweet*, and *Ance mair I hail thee, thou gloomy December*, from the texts of which conjectures have been ventilated which are glaringly ungenerous,

founded, as they are, on nothing more substantial than the vapours of prurient imagination.

Burns took up house in Dumfries in the second flat of a three-storey tenement in the Wee Vennel, the ground flat of which was occupied by his friend, John Syme, distributor of stamps for the district. Here he remained for a year and a half, when he removed to a self-contained cottage (the then equivalent of the modern suburban villa) in the Mill Vennel, since called Burns Street. His new appointment entailed an almost complete change from a country to a town life, which, of course, increased his social temptations tenfold. It has so often been asserted both in speech and writing that the Dumfries period of Burns's life was in every respect one of decadence that sheer repetition supplies the reason for the wide acceptance of the belief. No one, it must be admitted, can study that period in all its bearings without becoming conscious of a marked change in his outlook on life and the ordering of his daily walk and conversation. What were the manifestations of the change? He lived in an age of patronage, when the classes monopolised place and power to such an extent that it was next to impossible for a man in Burns's position to attain success without their countenance and support. His early patrons were men who,

like Mathew Henderson, "held the patents of their nobility direct from Almighty God," and Burns's gratitude to them was overflowing. But their successors were not all after that pattern.

He had experience of this patrician residuum in Edinburgh, in Ellisland, and now in Dumfries, where much of the ostentatious hero-worship was really nothing more than a fashionable condescension to literary success, which expected in return an effusive lackey acknowledgment which Burns was the last man to accord. He accepted their invitations on a footing of perfect equality, frankly expressing his opinions when the necessity arose, and enforcing them with argument when challenged by dissent. He had scant respect for mere wealth or family descent, and no tolerance for bumptious pretentiousness founded on either. To see a "lobster-coated puppy" or titled numbskull receive the honours due only to valour and sterling worth filled him with wrath unutterable, which found vent in occasional explosions when personages of that sort happened to cross his path. The fears engendered in the minds of the "stately Tories" of Dumfries by the social earthquake in France led them to look upon all sympathisers with that struggle for liberty as conspirators whose aim was to destroy law and order and inaugurate a Reign of

Terror. Burns's intimacy with the exclusive set who held these opinions did him a double mischief. "It is the private parties in the family way, among the hard-drinking gentlemen of the county," he writes to Mrs. Dunlop, "that do me the mischief"; and again, "Hard drinking is the devil with me, but they will not have me if I don't drink with them, and every time I give them a slice of my constitution." In company of this kind he sometimes gave rein to his keenly cutting tongue; and on more than one occasion he had reason to regret that he had played into the hands of ambushed enemies.

He was accused of being a Republican because he recognised in the French Revolution the revolt of an enslaved nation against centuries of autocratic tyranny; and despite all disclaimers on his part, he was looked upon as a "suspect" by the social magnates of Dumfries, who gave him the cold shoulder and belittled him with their tongues.[1]

[1] In 1793, there was an outburst of loyalty in Dumfries. The effigy of Tom Paine was carried through the streets and burnt by the populace. When the "Loyal Native Club" was formed, the enemies of Burns attempted to discredit both him and his associates in the following doggerel:

> "Ye sons of Sedition, give ear to my song,
> Let Syme, Burns, and Maxwell pervade every throng,
> With Cracken the attorney, and Mundell the quack,
> Send Willie the monger, to hell with a smack."

The alleged decadence did not follow the usual course. It was no gradual gravitation downwards: when Dumfries Snobdom sent him to Coventry, he perforce consorted more and more with men of his own way of thinking and nearer his own social level, with whom he discussed affairs of State in the Globe Tavern, under the stimulus of the customary potations. It was this hobnobbing with what they considered the forces of disorder which inspired the Malvolios of Dumfries to originate so many damaging rumours concerning him, and not because of any reputed habits of intemperance, which, by their own code of morals, would have been the highest of recommendations to their society.

Taken at the worst, his occasional aberrations were venial offences compared with their systematic debauchery. But many of his Dumfries friends—those who knew him best—never wavered in their fealty. His intimate associates were John Syme, of Ryedale; William Stewart, Closeburn; Dr. Mundell; James Gracie, Banker; John Lewars, Collector Mitchell, and Supervisor Findlater, of the Excise; Samuel Clark, Commissary and J.P. Clerk; John M'Murdo, Drumlanrig; M'Culloch, of Ardwell; Captain Hamilton, his landlord; Provost Staig; Colonel De Peyster; Rector Gray; and Dr.

Maxwell,—the last-named a man of advanced views who was present at the execution of Louis XVI. This does not by any means exhaust the list; his correspondence also shows no interruption of friendship between him and his early friends. Yet Currie avers that he latterly associated with "the lowest company"—a relative term doubtless borrowed from his *bourgeois* informants who applied it to everybody outwith their own pale, the boundaries of which formed the dividing line between the dining-room drunkard and the tavern sot. The intention was to place Burns in the latter category, and in this they succeeded only too well. Frequenters of taverns cannot choose their company, nor can they avoid acquiring some measure of affinity to the company they keep.

The persistent reiteration of Burns's intemperate habits in Dumfries has achieved its object chiefly because it contains the half-truth which is the most deadly of lies. Traced back, the nebulous gossip resolves itself into general charges which can neither be substantiated nor refuted. In one instance only are particulars given. As the story goes, Burns is said to have fallen asleep in the snow in the early hours of a cold winter morning after a carousal in the Globe Tavern, the result of which was the rheumatic fever which

caused his death. Each narrator has his own version of the incident, and none of them agree in the main details. Heron makes no mention of it; Currie places it early in January, 1796, but says nothing about a sleep in the snow; Lockhart places it early in February, with this addition of his own, "It has been said that he fell asleep in the snow." Robert Chambers followed Currie in his edition of 1851; but in 1854 he instituted enquiries on his own account and found that the balance of evidence made it appear that Burns fell asleep in his chair, and a relapse of his illness was brought on by the sudden change from the heated room to the Arctic temperature outside. We know for certain that he attended a masonic meeting in April following, which disposes of the "fatal chill" on which this Three-Black-Crows story is founded.

Mr. Findlater, his superior officer, who, as he informed Peterkin, saw more of him than any one else, testifies to his unremitting attention to business, and his consistent abstemiousness in official hours; adding, however, "that when set down on an evening with a few friends whom he liked, he was apt to prolong the social hour beyond the bounds which prudence would dictate." Rector Gray "never saw him in his morning hours like one suffering from the effects of last

night's intemperance," and adds, "The truth is that Burns was seldom intoxicated." Fines were imposed on the Dumfries Volunteers for non-attendance at drill, inebriety on parade, insubordination, etc., a record of which is preserved in the minutes of the corps in the Ewart Institute, Dumfries.[1] Not once does Burns's name appear on the list of defaulters from the date of his enlistment (February, 1795) till the last business meeting he attended in November of the same year. It says much for his patriotism and more for his regularity of life that he never was absent from a single drill (two hours on two days every week) during these ten months at the close of his life, regarding which Dr. Currie gives a very different account. Lockhart begs the question by the assumption that Currie and Walker conversed and corresponded with other persons than the enemies of Burns "before they penned their painful pages";[2] yet he refers to the written declaration of Findlater as testimony of the very highest authority, and to Gray as a man who would not put his name to anything but the truth.[3]

[1] See *Robert Burns as a Volunteer*, by William Will. (Glasgow, John Smith & Son, Ltd., 1919.)

[2] An unjustifiable use of "alliteration's artful aid."

[3] Maria Riddell, speaking of the obituary notices of Burns which appeared in certain contemporary periodicals, remarks, "I find private animosities have not yet subsided, and that envy has not yet exhausted all her shafts."

Where, then, are we to look for solid grounds of judgment? Lockhart's reply is the conventional one that "the truth lies between," that is, between Heron and Currie's unknown informants on the one hand, and Findlater and Gray on the other. But the evidence on both sides is so flatly contradictory, so mutually destructive, that no compromise of the kind is possible. With the exception of what follows, little can be gleaned from outside sources. In 1890, the *Dumfries and Galloway Courier and Herald* published the "Diary" of Dr. Grierson of Baitford (a native of Dumfries and contemporary of Burns), the entries in which cover the period between 1794 and 1811. Under date, "Monday, 25th July"—the day of Burns's funeral—he enters a lengthy note describing the funeral procession, which concludes with a short estimate of his character and achievements. From the general tone of the Diary it is evident that Dr. Grierson was a competent observer and unbiassed chronicler of events; what he says may therefore be taken as the average opinion of Burns prevalent amongst the respectable citizens of Dumfries at the time of his death. We quote the passage in full.

"Thus closed a ceremony [the funeral] which on the whole presented a solemn, grand, and affecting spectacle,

and accorded with the general sorrow and regret for the loss of a man whose like we can scarce see again. As for his private character and behaviour, it might not have been so fair as could have been wished, but whatever faults he had I believe he was always worst for himself, and it becomes us to pass over his failings in silence, and with veneration and esteem look to his immortal works which will live for ever. I believe his extraordinary genius may be said to have been the cause of bringing him so soon to his end, his company being courted by all ranks of people, and being of too easy and accommodating a temper, which often involved him in scenes of dissipation and intoxication, which by slow degrees impaired his health, and at last totally ruined his constitution. For originality of wit, rapidity of conception, and fluency of nervous phraseology he was unrivalled. He has left a wife and five children in very indigent circumstances, but I understand very liberal and extensive subscriptions are to be made for them."

These observations written at the time are worth volumes of tradition and hearsay evidence, and they bear the unmistakable impress of truth on every sentence.

An impartial examination of all the data available, including some of his own letters of that date, leads to the conclusion that in Dumfries he contracted the town-dwellers' tavern habits and sometimes drank with seasoned topers to untimeous hours, but never beyond the verge of being able to take care of himself. What does Burns himself say in answer to the charge ?

In January, 1794, he wrote to Samuel Clark,—"Some of our folks about the Excise Office, Edinburgh, had, and perhaps still have, conceived a prejudice against me as being a drunken, dissipated character. I might be all this, you know, and yet be an honest fellow; but you know that I am an honest fellow, and am nothing of this."

The fact is, Burns's physical constitution was an effectual bar to chronic dissipation; and this natural aversion to alcohol would have proved a more effectual antidote to temptation had he paid more heed to the warnings of Nature which followed on every occasion he sacrificed "a slice of his constitution" in trying to conform to the customs of the society latterly forced upon him by the necessity of providing for a wife and family.[1]

That hope had died within him and given

[1] The minutes of the Greenock Burns Club (1804 and 1809) contain declarations from Mr. John Wright (president in 1804) and Mr. Wilson, both brother excisemen with the Poet in Dumfries, denying most emphatically that he was "a man of intemperate or dissolute habits." Professor Dugald Stewart, referring to his life in Edinburgh, says: "He told me himself that the weakness of his stomach was such as to deprive him entirely of any merit in his temperance"; but Gilbert, in one of his letters to Mr. Roscoe, admits that when his brother removed to Dumfries, "he endeavoured to drink like other people." Mrs. Burns repeatedly declared that he never returned home in a condition remotely approaching that described in the rash and sweeping statements of Heron and Currie as "habitual."

place to chronic low spirits and gloomy forebodings is most true ; but to say, as has been said, that he was at war with the world—desperate and at bay—is as wide of the truth as the assertion we have dealt with, that he ended his days on the threshold of the almshouse.

Read the letters pertaining to the closing years of his life and you will find no falling off in the vigour and grasp of his intellect ; nor is there the slightest trace of misanthropy either in his prose or verse down to the last line he penned. *Fairest Maid on Devon's Banks*, written nine days before his death, is aglow with sunny memories of the friendships of happier days, not unmingled with prophetic misgivings concerning the blasting effects of evil tongues.

> " Could'st thou to malice lend an ear ?
> O did not love exclaim, ' Forbear ' ! "

Only those who have made a close study of the Johnson and Thomson correspondence, published and unpublished, with its editorial directions, suggestions for words and music, and voluminous notes on old songs can have an adequate idea of the labour he bestowed on the preservation and enrichment of the song literature of Scotland. From 1790 to the day of his death he contributed over 150 songs to Johnson's publication, besides some 80 additional to that

of Thomson during the last few years of his life. To catalogue these along with the additional pieces belonging to this period would show a record of work positively surprising to all who take the trouble of investigation. Speaking generally, they are as varied in theme and deft in execution as the best at the zenith of his powers. The humour of *Last May a Braw Wooer*, *Hey for a Lass wi' a Tocher*, *Contented wi' Little*, and the *Election Ballads* has lost none of its richness and brilliancy; while for pathos and condensed passion he never surpassed *My Nannie's Awa'*, *Ae Fond Kiss*, *Wilt thou be my Dearie*, *O Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast*, *Lassie wi' the Lintwhite Locks*, and the rest of the lyrics in praise of Chloris, the Arcadian name given by the poet to Jean Lorrimer, daughter of a farmer near Dumfries, whose family and that of the poet were on terms of closest friendship.

This young woman was his Dumfries divinity —his " regimen " for much song inspiration—to whom he addressed a series of exquisite lyrics which were, to begin with, vicarious offerings on behalf of a brother exciseman, who was an unsuccessful suitor for her hand. And seldom have the charms of a maiden been so sweetly sung and from so many points of view. She

married a worthless scapegrace, named Whelpdale, who, at the end of a few months, became bankrupt and deserted her, when she returned to her father's house. Burns admired her and sympathised with her misfortunes, and this may account for the sombre tone of certain detached lyrics composed about this date. With more or less certainty she may be set down as the inspirer of *Craigieburn Wood*, *Can I Cease to Care*, *Forlorn my Love*, *O Bonnie was yon Rosy Brier*, *Sae flaxen Were her Ringlets*, *Lassie wi' the Lintwhite Locks*, *Sleep'st thou or Wak'st thou*, *'Twasna her Bonie Blue E'e*, *From the White-blossomed Sloe*,[1] and others in which her baptismal name is introduced.[2]

Jessie Lewars, sister of John Lewars, his brother exciseman, was his last inspiring goddess. She attended him on his deathbed, relieving Mrs. Burns of much of the strain during that trying period. To her he dictated *Here's a Health to Ane I loe dear*, *O Wert thou in the Cauld Blast*, and several shorter pieces of the same character. His Galateas were never hewn from the cold

[1] The first verse only is Burns's; the second is doggerel by Dibdin. It was one of the "clinches" sent to Creech.

[2] The after fate of Chloris was tragical. She died in extreme indigence, in Edinburgh, in 1831, aged 56. Burns latterly changed the name "Chloris" in some of the lyrics to a more appropriate one, on the grounds that it interfered with the necessary simplicity of pastoral song.

marble; to the last, the living, breathing presence of a fine woman—throbbing flesh and blood—was indispensable for the transformation of the reality into the celestial-robed ideal of his poetic imagination.

Towards the end of July, 1793, Burns went on a tour through Wigtown and Dumfries with John Syme, who wrote an account of it for Dr. Currie. This production reveals the leading traits of Syme's character. It aims at dramatic effect rather than sober truth; and through it all he acts the part of the candid friend *in excelsis*. If the failing health and mental worry of Burns rendered him irritable, Syme leaves it to others to explain the immediate causes, and he magnifies the effects of the Poet's discomposure which appears to have been more a source of amusement to him than friendly solicitude.[1]

His account of the composition of *Scots Wha Hae* would have remained in the dramatic setting in which he placed it had it not been contradicted by Burns himself, who expressly states, in his letter to Thomson, that it was composed nearly

[1] Syme's admiration of Burns is unquestionable; but when he took the pen in hand he was more concerned about picturesque diction than strict adherence to fact. In a Montrose edition containing Currie's *Life of Burns*, with annotations on the margin in Syme's hand, there are many amusing blunders proving that correctness and reliability of memory were not among his characteristics. (See *Burns Chronicle*, No. XIII., 1904.)

two months later, when strolling on the banks of the Nith or the Cluden. The tale might have passed as an excrescence on Syme's memory had he left out this finishing touch,—" Next day, he produced me the following address of Bruce to his troops, and gave me a copy for Dalzell."[1] Currie, with the Thomson letter before him, glozes over the discrepancy by substituting a vague phrase for " my yesternight's evening walk," the effect of which was the substitution of a fiction for a fact seemingly not of the first importance, but which assumes a more serious aspect when brought to bear on the general reliability of Dr. Currie's principal witness. When addressing the Dumfries Burns Club, in 1820, Syme spoke of the " combined attacks on the Poet of prejudice and malignity to which some high and cruel names in the literary world have most ungenerously lent their sanction " ;[2] but as he gives no hint of the identity of the writers whom he so severely condemns, we are

[1] These copies have disappeared ; nobody has ever testified to their existence since. All the extant MSS. of the ode, except the one at first sent to Thomson, contain the version insisted on by Thomson to fit the air " Lewie Gordon " which required extra syllables in the fourth line of each stanza, thus " Or to *glorious* victory " etc. Burns reluctantly adopted the alteration against his better judgment, and Thomson, in deference to the popular verdict, reverted to the original form in his third volume (1802).

[2] *Robert Burns and Dumfries*, by Philip Sulley, Dumfries, 1896.

left to guess from the list given in our introductory chapter, beginning with Robert Heron and ending with Gilbert Burns.

In the year following, we are made aware by the tone of his letters that the poet was becoming more and more despondent—a frame of mind aggravated by the consciousness that his physical powers were failing. On New Year's Day, 1795, he informed Mrs. Dunlop that he "felt old age coming fast o'er his frame"; and this ebbing of vitality persisted till the autumn when the loss of his young and beloved daughter, supervening on an acute attack of rheumatism, confined him to the house. Up till the beginning of September, his spare time, as we have seen, was taken up with his Volunteer duties and the business meetings connected therewith, which he attended regularly as long as his health permitted. The last four months of 1795 mark a period remarkable for its barrenness of literary output, but for which his illness and family bereavement afford sufficient explanation.

Currie gives Dr. Maxwell as his authority for the details he submits regarding the causes of Burns's death, which raises the question why Dr. Maxwell's evidence was preferred to that of Dr. Brown, whose account for professional attendance appears in the list of the Poet's

posthumous debts.[1] A careful reading of that part of Dr. Currie's narrative which deals with the last illness of the Poet warrants the inference that Dr. Maxwell's evidence (indicated by a footnote) is confined to the last week of the Poet's life. In the pages immediately preceding Dr. Currie airs his own views in the form of a strangely inept pathological discussion of the deleterious effects of alcohol on the nerves and digestive organs of ordinary people, and the fatality attending its use by men of genius like Burns, who, from his birth, was predisposed to nervous disorders and to "fever of body as well as of mind." The application of his theories to the case of Burns, which immediately follows, Mr. Roscoe, writing to Gilbert Burns, admitted "was carried too far," in view of the evidence which had come to light after Dr. Currie's death.

Reading between the lines it is obvious that there was a divergence of medical opinion, justifying a suspicion that much of what reached Dr. Currie's ear was one-sided testimony. Burns writes to his friend Cunningham, a fortnight before he died,—"The medical folks tell me that

[1] From two short notes written from Ellisland we learn that Dr. Mundell was also one of his medical advisers; and Mrs. Burns included a Dr. Copeland among his intimate friends.

my last and only chance is bathing and country quarters." Writing to his father-in-law, ten days before his death, he uses stronger language, —"The medical people order me, as I value my existence, to fly to sea-bathing and country quarters." The parallel passage from Dr. Currie's biography runs,—"Impatient of medical advice, as well as of every species of control, he determined for himself to try the effects of bathing in the sea"—a direct contradiction needlessly loaded with reproach, revealing a fundamental disagreeance in diagnosis and treatment. Which are we to believe?

It falls here to be remarked that Dr. Currie was a man of strong prejudices which, when brought into play, he allowed to sway his judgment. In that drinking age, he was a voice crying in the wilderness; in his medical works, now forgotten, he advocated hydropathy as a panacea for most of the ills which flesh is heir to; and he denounces the use of alcoholic liquors as one of the chief causes of immorality.[1] How

[1] Charles Lamb thus wrote to Coleridge shortly after the publication of the Currie biography,—"Have you seen the new edition of Burns—his posthumous works and letters? I have only been able to procure the first volume, which contains his life—very confusedly and badly written, and interspersed with dull pathological and medical discussions. It is written by a Dr. Currie. Do you know the well-meaning doctor? Alas! *ne sutor ultra crepidam.*"

he came to be convinced that all Burns's trials and troubles in Dumfries were the direct results of his own errors of conduct cannot now be determined, for it is not at all likely that much will be added to what we already know of the sources from which he drew his information. Burns himself came nearest the truth when, within a few days of his death, he wrote to his cousin in Montrose,—"My physician assures me that melancholy and low spirits are half of my disease." Before the end of April, it became painfully evident that the end was approaching unless the advent of summer brought about some amelioration. Throughout June his condition grew worse and worse, and by the beginning of July he was at Brow, on the Solway Firth, to try the last expedient recommended to alleviate his suffering. But recovery was now out of the question.

He wrote to his friend Cunningham that he had become so emaciated and feeble that he would fail to recognise him, and he prepared his brother Gilbert for the worst by informing him that he had given up all hope of recovery. Maria Riddell, who was an invalid at the time and resident near Brow, invited him to call upon her on the former friendly footing, to which he immediately responded. Entering the room with

"the stamp of death imprinted on his features," he discomposed her with this startling salutation, "Well, madame, have you any commands for the other world?" What a revelation of self-communing and manly resignation do these words convey! No whining, no unavailing regrets; face to face with death, his abiding faith in a just and merciful God remained steadfast; and like the true man he was, his last thoughts were not for himself but for the future of his wife and helpless children. A fresh attack of fever so reduced him that it was with the greatest difficulty he walked from the conveyance to his own door on his return home. Two days afterwards, he became delirious and continued in that state, with brief intervals of consciousness, till death supervened. "The death of Burns," says Dr. Currie, "made a strong and general impression especially on the inhabitants of the town and county in which he had spent the latter years of his life." How "strong and general" was the impression can be gathered from Dr. Grierson's account of the funeral, which corrects that of Currie in so many particulars that we reproduce it *in extenso*.[1]

[1] Grierson's *Diary* was published in pamphlet form in 1890. Currie gives 26th July as the date of the funeral, and the 25th as the date of removal of the corpse from the death chamber to the Court House.

" Thursday, 21*st July*, 1796.—This morning Mr. Robert Burns died after a long illness.

Monday, 25*th July*.—This day at 12 o'clock went to the burial of Robert Burns who died on the 21st, aged 38 years. In respect to the memory of such a genius as Mr. Burns, his funeral was uncommonly splendid. The military here consisted of the Cinque Ports Cavalry and Angusshire Fencibles, who having handsomely tendered their services, lined the streets on both sides from the Court House to the burial ground.[1] (The corpse was carried from the place where Burns died to the Court House last night.) Order of procession :—The firing party, which consisted of twenty of the Royal Dumfries Volunteers (of which Mr. Burns was a member) in full uniform with crapes on the left arm, marched in front with their arms reversed, moving in a slow and solemn time to the ' Dead March ' in *Saul*, which was played by the military band belonging to the Cinque Ports Cavalry. Next to the firing party was the band, then the bier or corpse supported by six of the Volunteers, who changed at intervals. The relations of the deceased and a number of the respectable inhabitants of the town and county followed next. Then the remainder of the Volunteers followed in rank, and the procession closed with a guard of Angusshire Fencibles. The great bells of the churches tolled at intervals during the time of the procession. When arrived at the churchyard gate, the funeral party formed two lines and leaned their heads on their firelocks pointed to the ground. Through this space the corpse was carried and borne to the grave. The party then drew up alongside of it, and fired three volleys over the coffin when deposited in the earth. His wife was delivered

[1] A distance of more than half a mile.

of a child about an hour after he was removed from the house." [1]

Since then the Centenary of his birth and of his death have both been celebrated with great pomp and circumstance; but for fervent and affecting expression of sorrow neither of them can be said to have excelled this spontaneous demonstration only four days after his death. His ashes were interred in an ordinary lair in the north-east corner of St. Michael's Churchyard, which Mrs. Burns covered with a plain slab inscribed with the name and age of her husband; and there they remained till 1815, when they were removed to the Mausoleum. In the original grave lie the remains of Mrs. Pecheron, eldest daughter of Mrs. Dunlop, in accordance with her request on her death-bed in 1825—a remarkable proof of the deep and lasting affection inspired by the personality of the Poet before disease and disappointment had changed the complexion of his life.

[1] Maxwell Burns, who died in childhood.

CHAPTER V

POSTHUMOUS

When the grave closed o'er him, the country began to awake to a sense of the great loss it had sustained. Subscriptions were set on foot on behalf of the widow and children, and soon a sum of £1200 was raised which was invested by Sir James Shaw, Lord Mayor of London, in Government securities. Dr. Currie's edition realised a further sum of £1400; and in 1817 Lord Panmure granted a belated annuity of £50 to Mrs. Burns, which, however, she renounced before the second payment, the amount being made good by her sons, William Nicol and James Glencairn, who had received commissions in the East India Company's service. In 1815, the Dumfries Mausoleum was erected at a cost of £2000; and, in 1823, the graceful cenotaph on the banks of the Doon was completed at a cost of £3300. The foundation stone of the commemorative Grecian Temple, on the Calton Hill, Edinburgh, was laid in 1831,

the cost of the structure being over £3000, exclusive of the statue by Flaxman (finished by his brother-in-law, Denman), which was presented gratuitously to the Committee, the chairman of which was General Dunlop, eldest son of Mrs. Dunlop, of Dunlop.

In 1844, a great Festival, attended by thousands, was held in honour of the sons of Burns, at Alloway, a brilliant concourse of literary celebrities being presided over by the Earl of Eglinton, with Professor John Wilson in the croupier's chair. We need follow the growth of his fame no further; it is recorded wherever a statue or memorial has been erected to his memory, and these within the last century have not been few, and are continually being added to. To-day they are found in all countries and climes, material proofs that the voice from Mossgiel has been heard wherever there were human ears to hear, and it has not yet lost anything of the original strength and sweetness of its tone.

The characteristics and evidences of the genius of Burns have employed so many able pens in the intervening years, and the heritage of poetry and song he left behind him been so often weighed in the balances by keenest critical intellects, that it would be supererogation on our part to dilate

upon either topic, even though we considered it necessary and ourselves equal to the task. His place amongst the great ones of the earth is assured by universal consent; "fight who will about styles and forms, Burns's rank," says Byron, "is in the first class of his art." His genius was the transmitter of the voice of Nature to the wireless receiver of every human heart; and that is the reason why his works from the first have been read with eager delight by all classes and conditions of men and women in the civilised universe; and they will continue to be read as long as human nature remains what it is. In them, all the loves, hopes, and fears of lowly humanity were translated into the virile, liquid Scottish tongue, not a word of which fell meaningless, for this prophet who had arisen amongst the Scottish people was a man of like passions and spake like unto themselves.

It has been said that Burns is more praised than read. If there is any substance in the charge, it ought in fairness to be applied all round, for few hero-worshippers have read to the last page of their Service Book. The generations which could distinguish the shades of meaning in word and phrase of *The Auld Farmer's Salutation* and *Hallowe'en* have indeed passed away; still, there is as much of the language

yet in common use as enables Scottish men and women everywhere to appreciate to the full the verbal charm of the Epistles and Songs—the latter a harmony of vowel sounds which finds a rival only in the soft accents of the Italian tongue. In Scotland, Burns's songs are household words, and many of his lines have passed into national proverbs. When Scotland parted with her Parliamentary independence, decadence of the national tongue received a new impetus which continued throughout the eighteenth century, the wheels of industrial and commercial progress gradually grinding down the natural barriers which for ages had preserved the individuality of the two nations. When the bell-wether followers waxed strong enough to affix the stigma of their dreaded vulgarity to the language, its fate as a national tongue was sealed.

Let us not be misunderstood. Burns, with trifling exception, conducted his extensive correspondence in the English tongue, and his speech conformed to the lingual medium common to the two countries in the super-peasant circles in which he latterly moved, just as every educated Scotsman has done from that day to this. But this bowing to convenience does not imply acquiescence in the destruction of the language by disuse, nor the

expungement from the national literature of that which gives it its national character. The decadent influences have continued since Burns's day, and it behoves every patriotic Scotsman and national organisation to combat them by all means within their power. Much can be done by concerted action if directed into proper channels. The Kailyairders were the representatives of a spurious renaissance, short-lived because it lacked truthfulness, and was, moreover, saturated with mawkish sentiment and laboured affectation of word and idiom.

In the poetry of Burns is found the "pure well of *Scottish* undefiled," whose springs go down to the reservoirs accumulated by Gavin Douglas, Lindsay, Dunbar, Blind Harry, Barbour, and the other "makaris" named and nameless, who all wrote in a language scarce distinguishable from that of Chaucer and other Southron writers, their contemporaries. The contemned "dialect" is still the predominant element of English speech, its Anglo-Saxon simplicity and directness beneficently leavening the accretions of classical origin, the preponderance of which in Milton, for instance, renders him a sealed book to the general. The founding of chairs in our Universities for the study of national subjects is a most hopeful sign of the times, but it does not cover the whole

ground. The sympathies of the masses outside College walls must be enlisted, and this opens up a wide field for the energies of Burns Clubs and kindred associations. Each in its own locality can constitute itself a centre for rousing public interest by means of competitions in Scottish recitations and the singing of Scots songs, and by moving for a more extended representation of Scottish authors than is usually found in the ordinary school "Collection."

Much good has already been done in this direction by enterprising Burns Clubs in all parts of the country, and the motives which underlie their action should be encouraged in every way if the language of Burns is not to become, in a generation or two, a mere memory of the past. We are sanguine enough to believe that the *olla podrida* of guttural slang and corrupted English which now passes as "Braid Scots," especially in the large towns and populous districts, could be sifted and winnowed by constant comparison with the purer forms of expression exemplified in our representative Scottish writers. In this way the "gude auld Scottish tongue" would be purified and preserved by a more direct and practical method than magazine articles and lectures, however able and well-intentioned these may be.

No man or woman can pretend to know what manner of man Burns was who has not made some acquaintance with his prose compositions, which consist almost exclusively of letters to his friends and acquaintances. Over six hundred of these have been recovered and published, which take up as much space in print as his poems and songs. Through the latter runs a faint outline of the main events of his life, but unless these events are strung in orderly sequence on the thread of the narrative they lose most of their value as indices to the influences which shaped his thoughts and guided the current of his life. In his letters, the reader is brought into closer contact with him; he looks over his shoulder, as it were, while he unbosoms himself to a trusted friend, or communes with himself, in his *Commonplace Book*, on the experiences of life and their effect upon the reflective mind. His prose is common ground to English and Scottish readers alike, for which reason no one south of the Cheviots can plead insufficiency of data on which to form some estimate of the marvellous mentality which would have raised Burns to eminence in any walk of life even had poetic genius been denied him.

There is a consensus of opinion among those who had the fullest opportunity of judging

that poetry was not his strongest point. The best part of him—the witchery of his tongue —died with him. No Boswell has chronicled his sayings; so we are driven back on his letters as the only means of ascertaining his philosophy of life, his impressions of the men and manners of his time, and his inner thoughts on the great mysteries which lie beyond. The literary style of his prose—condemned by some as pedantic and stilted—was characteristic of the period, and he cannot fairly be blamed for following the acknowledged masters and accredited models. Allowance should also be made for the fact that with many of his correspondents he had to cast about for a suitable subject and make the most of it till the sheet was filled under the dominating consciousness that something extraordinary was always expected when he took the pen in hand. Writing to his friend, Alexander Cunningham (August, 1792), he alludes to this very difficulty,—"Come, thou Spirit, and assist a poor devil who is quite jaded in the attempt to share half an idea among half a hundred words; to fill up four quarto pages, while he has not got one single sentence of recollection, information, or remark worth recording."

The majority of his letters bear unmistakable signs of as careful and elaborate composition as

his poetry, especially those addressed to his social superiors ; and so anxious was he to appear always at his best that he had a trick of repeating phrases and sentences which particularly pleased him to divers correspondents about the same date. Despite all fault found with them, the most exacting of his critics cannot deny that his letters contain many passages which, for elegance and felicity of expression, can bear favourable comparison with the best English authors. The communication to Dr. Moore which contains his Autobiography is the longest and best example of the style that was natural to him. It is spontaneous, concise, and graphic, with no affectation or trace of imitation ; and every line of it breathes that spirit of uncompromising honesty and strict adherence to truth at all costs which permeated every fibre of his being. He had a wide range of correspondents —titled members of the aristocracy, strangers in positions of power, landed proprietors, ladies and gentlemen whose acquaintance he had made in Edinburgh ; and familiar associates like Gavin Hamilton, Richard Brown, Alexander Cunningham, Ainslie, Cleghorn, and Robert Muir—and he accommodated his moods to the expectations of them all so successfully that his communications are almost as fresh and illumin-

ating to-day as when they were first penned. Were his prose as widely read as his poetry, we venture to say that truer and juster views of Burns's character would take the place of those for which his early biographers are mainly responsible.

In his letters, the reader will find ample material for forming his own opinions independent of this writer or that, whose conclusions are usually taken on trust without examination of the premisses or verification of *ex parte* quotations. The ordinary cheap edition does not contain the letters for obvious reasons; they are accessible only in the more elaborate editions whose cost militates against their circulation where they are most urgently required. A popular edition, containing at least a judicious selection from his prose works, and issued at a price within the means of the humblest of the Poet's admirers, is a desideratum surely within the possibilities of publishing enterprise.

Of all his correspondents, Mrs. Dunlop takes precedence for duration and bulk of the correspondence, Burns having written her no fewer than eighty letters, which drew from her over a hundred replies during the ten years between 1786 and the date of the Poet's death.[1] In

[1] See *Burns and Mrs. Dunlop*, by Dr. William Wallace—London, 1898.

every one of these effusions, no matter what the subject in hand, Burns is seen at his best. His profound respect for the sterling qualities and mental abilities of his correspondent declares itself all through the series, a careful perusal of which we recommend to the Burns student. Those addressed to Margaret Chalmers are on an equally high level, with here and there a warmer tone observable as befitted a suitor desirous of gaining entry to the good graces of a young and accomplished woman for whose charms and accomplishments he entertained the highest admiration.

His communications of a more confidential nature are for the most part addressed to Gavin Hamilton, John Richmond, and Robert Ainslie. He wrote also in familiar terms to Alexander Cunningham, Cleghorn, and Peter Hill, but not without constantly recurring evidences of deliberate effort to be unconventional both in thought and language. His opinions—social, political, and religious—will be found scattered through his letters to Graham of Fintry, Erskine of Mar, the editor of the *Star*, Robert Muir, Mrs. Dunlop, Ainslie, Cunningham and others, an attentive perusal of which will enable the earnest enquirer to correct misrepresentation by restoring quotations to their contexts, and

comparing them with other passages bearing on the same subject.

Only in this way can independent opinions be formed. No biographer can write the life history of a fellow-mortal without revealing—unconsciously for the most part—the dominant features of his own character; and his success or failure in the task depends on the amount of restraint imposed on his own egoism, combined with the judiciousness displayed in his selection of materials. In every biography which has become a classic, the biographer and his idiosyncrasies have been sedulously kept in the background; nor has any flaw in the subject been magnified in the foreground to dwarf the rest of the picture—two essentials of this kind of authorship wofully wanting in most of the biographies of Burns. By dwarfing parts of the human figure and enlarging others to monstrous proportions, the caricaturist easily achieves his purpose; and the same method pursued by the psychologist produces similar results. Dr. Currie betrays a persistent habit of submerging his main theme in shallow pools of editorial philosophising, while the prejudice begot of his belief in the baneful physical and mental effects of alcohol permeates most of the pages of the text exclusively his own.

Among the moderns Mr. Henley magnifies the faults of Burns with the ultimate object of discrediting the Burnsolatry and Mariolatry which the Common Burnsite, as he believed, had transformed into a Fetishism of his own devising. In proof whereof he recounts at great length, and with an imposing array of suppositions and conjectures, "the story of Burns's marriage with Jean Armour and the legend of his Highland Lassie." In the foregoing pages we have set down the plain facts of both passages in the Poet's life, and we leave it to the judgment of the reader to determine whether or not they bear out the construction put upon them by a prosecuting counsel whose pleadings, as a matter of course, proceed upon a one-sided manipulation of the evidence.

"Dear bought Bess" was born, not in November, 1784, but on 22nd May, 1785, when Burns was in his 27th year; and there was no Armour entanglement till the Spring of 1786, fully two years after the date condescended upon as the beginning of Burns's acquaintance with her—a pregnant commentary on the alleged "coming habit of the Scots peasant woman" when Goatfoot "whistled on her from the thicket." Mary Campbell—no myth, nor

idealised abstraction, but an entity as substantial as Jean Armour—is labelled a "light skirts" on a show of flimsiest evidence which would not hang a dog; in the setting forth of which "preferences," more glaring than those of Stevenson, are manifested by the omission of all reference to the previous attentions Burns had paid to Mary Campbell, Jean's umquhile repudiation of her marriage vows, and the repeated provocations of her family which led her husband reluctantly to make the impulsive, half-hearted retaliations which form the foundation of Mr. Henley's case against him.

The tragedy of Burns's life was, that his natural place amongst the men of his generation was denied him. Born to command, he was doomed to serve; and the constant friction between the consciousness of what he was and what he should have been fanned the smouldering fire which consumed him. No one can venture to predict how his passionate pilgrimage may be interpreted when the threatenings of upheaval, presently observable throughout the civilised world, have subsided into a calm which may revolutionise the traditions, and inaugurate wide departures from the religious beliefs and the social and political ethics which for generations have been recognised as sure guide-posts on the highway of human progress.

APPENDIX I

A

BURNS TO WILLIAM CRUICKSHANK

30th March, 1788.—"I have fought my way severely through the savage hospitality of this country—[the object of all hosts being] to send every guest drunk to bed if they can." (*Extract.*)

B

CLARINDA TO BURNS

November, 1791.—"I take the liberty of addressing a few lines on behalf of your old acquaintance, Jenny Clow, who, to all appearance, is at this moment dying. . . . In circumstances so distressing, to whom can she so naturally look for aid as to the father of her child. . . ." (*Extract.*)

"5th March, 1788.—I hope you have not forgotten to kiss the little cherub (the eldest surviving twin) for me. Give him fifty, and think Clarinda blessing him all the while. I pity his

mother (Jean Armour) sincerely, and wish a certain affair happily over." (*Extract.*)

C

THE DUNDONALD SESSION RECORD

" 1784, April 25th—Mary Campbell, an unmarried woman, also appeared before the Session, and confessed she had brought forth a child in the parish of Mauchline. She was sessionally rebuked and exhorted to repentance, and being interrogate who was the father of her child answered John Hay in Paulstone, and that she resided in this parish when the guilt was committed. The Session appointed Mr. Duncan (the minister) to write John Hay of this other accusation, and to desire his answer thereto."

" 1784, May 2nd.—Same day Mr. Duncan reported that he had wrote John Hay and had received his answer, which was read and appointed to be insert in the minutes—the tenor whereof follows : ' Paulstone, May 1st, 1784.—Sir—yours of the 27th April I received intimats me that Mary Campbell had appeared in your Session and charged me as the father of her child. That I entirely deny as I never had

anything to do with her that way. I am, Sir, your most humble servant (signed John Hay).'"

"1784, May 9th.—Same day Mary Campbell appeared before the Session, and upon hearing the Minutes of last Session read, still persisted in her accusation of John Hay as the father of her child. Being interrogate if she could adduce any presumption to fix the guilt upon him, declared she had received money from him at two different times for the maintenance of her and the child to the amount of ten shillings each time, and further declares that Mr. Hay said to her that he would give her money to help up with the child, but that he would not take with it publicly; being further asked if she had any witnesses to produce to verify these assertions, answered she had none. The Session, considering the above affair, delay doing anything more about it till further light be given anent it, as it appears to them only a bare accusation."

"1786, July 26th.—The Session, understanding that the Justices of the Peace have ordained John Hay to pay four pounds sterling yearly to Mary Campbell for the maintenance of the child she has laid to his charge, and as she now resides in the parish of Stair, agree to transfer the cognisance of that scandal as to her to the Kirk-session of Stair, who will please to take the said

Mary Campbell under discipline for her guilt of fornication with John Hay, and absolve her therefrom according to the rules of this Church, and appoint their clerk to send a copy of their Minutes to the Rev. Mr. John Steel, minister of Stair."

"1787, December 17th.—John Hay voluntarily confessed fornication with Janet Siller and Mary Campbell and also with Euphan Bowie from the New Town of Ayr, and the father of a child brought forth by each of them, and also confessed fornication with Margaret Courdie and Agnes M'Cletchie, formerly confessed by him. The Sess. appointed him to confess publicly any day he pleased."

D

BURNS TO JAMES SMITH

"26th June, 1788.—This, my dear Sir, is now the third letter I have written you since I have heard from you, or, more properly speaking, since I *viva voce* heard of you. This is merely a business scrawl, consequently 'I expect your answer in the course of post.' I have waited on Mr. Auld about my marriage affair, and stated that I was legally fined for an irregular marriage by a Justice of the Peace. He says, if I bring

an attestation of this by the two witnesses, there shall be no more litigation about it. As soon as this comes to hand, please write me in the way of familiar epistle that 'such things are.' Direct to me at Mauchline. Mrs. Burns joins in kindest compliments to you along with, my dear friend,—Yours most truly."

E

BURNS TO JOHN RICHMOND

"9th July, 1786.—I have waited on Armour since her return home; not from the least view of reconciliation, but merely to ask for her health, and to you I will confess it, from a foolish hankering fondness, very ill placed indeed. The mother forbade me the house, nor did Jean show that penitence that might have been expected."

(*Extract.*)

"30th July, 1786.—Would you believe it? Armour has got a warrant to throw me in jail till I find security for an enormous sum. This they keep an entire secret, but I got it by a channel they little dream of; and I am wandering from one friend's house to another, and, like a true son of the gospel, 'have no where to lay my head.'"

(*Extract.*)

BURNS TO DAVID BRICE

"17th July, 1786.—Poor Armour is come back again to Mauchline, and I went to call for her, and her mother forbade me the house, nor did she herself express much sorrow for what she has done." (*Extract.*)

F

BURNS TO CLARINDA

"23rd February, 1788.—Now for a little news that will please you. I, this morning, as I came home, called for a certain woman (Jean Armour). I was disgusted with her—I cannot endure her ! I, while my heart smote me for the profanity, tried to compare her with my Clarinda ; 'Twas setting the expiring glimmer of a farthing taper beside the cloudless glory of the meridian sun. *Here* was tasteless insipidity, vulgarity of soul, and mercenary fawning ; *there* polished good sense, Heaven-born genius, and the most generous, the most delicate, the most tender passion. I have done with her, and she with me." (*Extract.*)

BURNS TO ROBERT AINSLIE

"3rd March, 1788.—I have been through sore tribulation, and under much buffeting of the

Wicked One, since I came to this country. Jean I found banished, like a martyr—forlorn, destitute, and friendless; all for the good old cause. I have reconciled her to her fate; I have reconciled her to her mother; I have taken her a room; I have taken her to my arms; I have given her a mahogany bed; I have given her a guinea. . . . But as I always am on every occasion—I have been prudent and cautious to an astounding degree; I swore her, privately and solemnly, never to attempt any claim on me as a husband, even though anybody should persuade her she had such a claim (which she had not) neither during my life, nor after my death. She did this like a good girl." . . . (*Extract.*)

[From this letter we have quoted only what is necessary to establish the truth.] Mr. Henley remarks that it is a Crochallan communication "from Fencible to Fencible." That is so, and the responsibility for publicity rests with the friend (?) who violated the privacy of a letter, the contents of which the Poet purposely spiced to suit the Crochallan palate.

G

BURNS TO GAVIN HAMILTON

"Mossgiel, Saturday Morn." [Allan Cunningham and Scott Douglas give the date 'About 14th April, 1786.']

"My honoured Dear Benefactor." Follows the text printed by both these authorities, which is

substantially correct down to the concluding sentences which, in the original, are in these terms,—

"Would you believe it, tho I had not a hope, not even a wish to make her mine after her damnable conduct; yet when he told me the names were all cut out of the papers, my heart died within me, and he cut my very veins with the news. Perdition seize her falsehood and perjurious perfidy, but God bless her and forgive her, poor, once dear, misguided girl. She is ill advised. Do not despise me, Sir, I am indeed a fool, but a knave is an infinitely worse character than anybody, I hope, will dare to give

the unfortunate Robt. Burns."

APPENDIX II.

EDITIONS PUBLISHED DURING THE POET'S LIFETIME.

POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT. By Robert Burns: Thin octavo, 240 pp. Kilmarnock: printed by John Wilson. - - 1786

POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT. By Robert Burns: 8vo, Edinburgh: printed for the Author, and sold by William Creech. - 1787

POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT. By Robert Burns: 8vo, London: A. Strahan; T. Cadell. - - - - - - - - 1787

POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT. By Robert Burns: 12mo, Philadelphia: Peter Stewart and George Hyde. - - - - 1788

POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT. By Robert Burns: 12mo, New York: J. and A. M'Lean. - - - - - - - - 1788

POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT. By Robert Burns: 12mo, Belfast: James Magee. 1787
Do. do (Second Edition) - - - 1789
Do. do. (Third Edition) - - - 1790
Do. do. (Fourth Edition) - - - 1793

POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT. By Robert Burns: 12mo, Dublin: William Gilbert. - - - - - - - - 1787
Do. do. (Second Edition) - - - 1789
Do. do. (Third Edition) - - - 1790

POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT. By Robert Burns: In two volumes, 8vo, Edinburgh: printed for T. Cadell, London. - - 1793

POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT. By Robert Burns: In two volumes, 8vo, Edinburgh: printed for T. Cadell, London. - - 1794

SOME REVIEWS, PRESS NOTICES, ETC., WHICH APPEARED DURING THE LIFETIME OF THE POET.

1786.

PROPOSALS FOR PUBLISHING BY SUBSCRIPTION SCOTCH POEMS. By Robert Burns. The Work to be elegantly Printed in One Volume, Octavo, Price Stitched, Three Shillings. [April 14, 1786.] (Only one copy known to exist.) Kilmarnock: John Wilson. Folio. (Eight dozen copies printed.)

THE EDINBURGH MAGAZINE or LITERARY MISCELLANY. Vol. 4, July-Dec., 1786, 8vo, Edinburgh: printed for J. Sibbald and sold by J. Murray, London.

October, Pp. 284-288, Review of Poems chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. By Robert Burns.

November, Pp. 366-368, Extracts from the Poems of Robert Burns ("To a Mouse," "Epistle to W—— S——n," "Epistle to a Young Friend," and Extracts from "The Vision.").

December, Pp. 371-375, Critique on the Poems of Robert Burns from "The Lounger."

THE LOUNGER, a Periodical Paper. Published at Edinburgh in the years 1785 and 1786. Folio. Edinburgh: printed for William Creech.

No. 97, page 385, Saturday, 9th December, 1786, "Extraordinary account of Robert Burns, The Ayrshire Ploughman, with Extracts from his Poems." [Written by Henry Mackenzie.]

THE CALEDONIAN MERCURY. Dec. 20, 1786. "To a Haggis."

THE MONTHLY REVIEW, or LITERARY JOURNAL. By Several Hands. Vol. 75, July-Dec., 1786, 8vo. London: R. Griffiths.

December, page 439, Article 5, Review of "Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, by Robert Burns": 8vo. Kilmarnock printed. No Bookseller's name nor price, 1786.

THE EUROPEAN MAGAZINE. Vol. 10, July-Dec., 1786, 8vo. London.

December, pp. 461-463, "Surprising Effects of Original Genius, exemplified in the Poetical Productions of Robert Burns, an Ayrshire Ploughman." From "The Lounger" of Dec. 9, 1786.

NEW LONDON MAGAZINE. Vol. 2, p. 252. A review.

THE CRITICAL REVIEW, *circa*, 1786, notice of R. B.

1787.

THE EUROPEAN MAGAZINE. Vol. 12, July-Dec., 1787, 8vo. London.

July, p. 57, "Man was made to Mourn, a Dirge. By Mr. Robert Burns."

THE LOUNGER. 3 vols. [? 2nd Edit.] 12mo, Edinburgh: A. Strahan.

Vol. 3, pp. 278-289, "Extraordinary account of Robert Burns, The Ayrshire Ploughman, with Extracts from his Poems." [By Henry Mackenzie.]

THE GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE for 1787. Vol. 57, part 2, July-Dec., 1787: London. Pp. 615-617, Review of "The Lounger" of 9th Dec., 1786.

Pp. 617-618. Review of "Poems chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. By Robert Burns." (Edinburgh Ed.), p. 623, "On a Scotch Bard gone to the West Indies."

THE ANNUAL REGISTER. Vol. 29, London, 1787.

P. 171, "Address to the Deil."

P. 174. "A Dedication to G**** H******* Esq."

BURNS' CALF TURN'D INTO A BULL or some Remarks upon his Mean and unprovoked attack of Mr. S***** [Rev. James Steven] when preaching from Matt. iv. 2. To which is added some observations on Dr. M'G——l's [William MacGill] practical essay. By a Rhymer. [In verse.] [? Edinburgh.] Printed in the year 1787. Sm. 8vo. (Consists of 4 leaves.)

THE NEW ANNUAL REGISTER FOR 1786, Vol. 7, 8vo. London. Domestic Literature, pp. 279-280. Criticism of The Kilmarnock Edition.

THE SCOTS MAGAZINE FOR 1787, Vol. 49, 8vo. Edinburgh. January, "To a Haggis."

THE UNIVERSAL MAGAZINE OF KNOWLEDGE AND PLEASURE, Vol. 80, Jan.-June, 1787, 8vo. London: W. Bent, 1878, May, pp. 352-355, Review of "Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. By Robert Burns."

THE SCOTS MUSICAL MUSEUM. Humbly dedicated to the Catch Club Instituted at Edinburgh, June, 1771. By James Johnson. May 22, Vol. 1, 8vo. (4 Songs by Burns.)

THE MONTHLY REVIEW or LITERARY JOURNAL. Vol. 77, July-Dec., 1787. 8vo. London: R. Griffiths, 1787. December, p. 491, Article 18, Review of "Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. By Robert Burns." Second Edition, 8vo. 6s. Creech, Edin.; Cadell, London, 1787.

THE EUROPEAN MAGAZINE. Vol. 11, Jan.-June, 1787, 8vo. London. June, p. 452, "The gloomy night is gathering fast. By Robert Burns."

THE CALF [a Satire in Verse]. The Unco Calf's Answer. Virtue. "To a Mountain Bard" and the "Deil's Answer to his vera worthy frien' Robert Burns." [In verse.] By Ebenezer Picken. ? Edinburgh. Printed in the Present Year [1787]. Small 8vo. (Consists of 4 leaves.)

SCOTS POEMS. By William Taylor. Printed in Edinburgh, 1787. "On Reading Mr. Burns's Poems."

PROSPECTUS OF THE SECOND EDITION OF BURNS' POEMS. [Edinburgh. 1787.] (At least 2 copies known.)

THE LOUNGER. Dublin. Mackenzie's review of the Kilmarnock Edition. Printed for Colles, Burnet, and twelve others.

THE NEWCASTLE JOURNAL. 2nd June, 1787. "Verses on prospect of going to the West Indies."

THE LOUNGER: a Periodical Paper published at Edinburgh in the years 1785 and 1786. By the authors of the Mirror, Third Edition, 3 vols. London:

printed for A. Strahan and T. Cadell and William Creech, Edinburgh. Vol. 3, pp. 278-289, "Extraordinary account of Robert Burns, the Ayrshire Ploughman."

THE ABERDEEN JOURNAL. 11th September, 1787, contains a notice of Burns arriving at Aberdeen.

NEW TOWN AND COUNTRY MAGAZINE. Vol. 1, p. 326.

1788.

THE SCOTS MUSICAL MUSEUM. Humbly dedicated to the Catch Club: Instituted at Edinburgh: June, 1771. By James Johnson. March 1, Vol. 2, 8vo. Edinburgh. (The preface and 38 songs, by Burns.)

CATALOGUE OF FIVE HUNDRED CELEBRATED AUTHORS OF GREAT BRITAIN, NOW LIVING: the whole arranged in alphabetical order: and including a complete List of their Publications with occasional Strictures and Anecdotes of their Lives. London: printed for R. Faulder, 1788, 8vo. Contains a brief notice of "Burns, Robert, a ploughman in the County of Ayr in the Kingdom of Scotland." [Written by — Marshall, of Epsom, Surrey.]

THE LOUNGER: a Periodical Paper, published at Edinburgh in the years 1785 and 1786, in Three Volumes. The Fourth Edition, 12mo, London: printed for A. Strahan and T. Cadell in the Strand and W. Creech, at Edinburgh, 1788.

Vol. 3, pp. 264-274, Saturday, Dec. 9, 1786. Extraordinary account of Robert Burns, the Ayrshire Ploughman, with Extracts from his Poems. [By Henry Mackenzie.]

POEMS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS. By John Lapraik. Kilmarnock: printed by John Wilson, 1788. 8vo. (Contains 240 pages.)

POEMS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS IN SCOTS AND ENGLISH. By James Macaulay. Edinburgh: printed for the Author, 1788. 12mo: P. 195, "Rhyming Epistle to Mr. R***** B****, Ayrshire."

POETICAL ESSAYS. By Gavin Turnbull. Glasgow: printed by David Niven, 1788, 8vo. P. 137. "The Bard, a Poem in the manner of Spenser, inscribed to Mr. R***** B****," "Ode to D**** S***** " [David Sillar] the Poet's Friend.

ANIMADVERSIONS ON SOME POETS AND POETASTERS OF THE PRESENT AGE, ESPECIALLY R——T B——S. [Robert Burns] and J——n L——k [John Lapraik], with a contrast of some of the former age. [In verse.] By James Maxwell, Poet, Paisley: 1788, 12mo. (A tract.)

THE SCOTS MAGAZINE. 1788. 8vo. P. 558, contains an "Epistle to Mr. Robert Burns."

P. 608, contains another "Epistle to Mr. Robert Burns."

1789.

JUVENILE POEMS, WITH REMARKS ON POETRY, ETC. ETC. By John Armstrong, Student in the University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh: Peter Hill, 1789. (Contains two pieces in Burns's honour.)

EDINBURGH MAGAZINE OR LITERARY MISCELLANY. Vol. 10, July-Dec., 1789. Edinburgh.

Nov., p. 357, "Tam Glen, a Scots Ballad," subscribed T. S. Pp. 357-8, "The Humble Petition of Bruar Water."

Monthly Register, p. 27, an account of the "Erection of a Monument to Ferguson the Poet. By Mr. Burns." (Also a poem On Winter, in the Scotch Dialect, by Burns, junior, of Inverseadle.)

THE PRACTICAL FIGURER. By William Halbert, Schoolmaster at Auchinleck. Paisley: John Neilson, 1789, 8vo. "Robert Burns, Parnassus," in a list of Subscribers.

POEMS. By David Sillar. Kilmarnock: John Wilson, 1789, 8vo. (Contains 247 pages.)

THE WEEKLY MISCELLANY. Vol. 2, Glasgow, 1789-1790. P. 175, "Captain Grose's Peregrinations through Scotland."

OBSERVATIONS RELATIVE CHIEFLY TO PICTURESQUE BEAUTY MADE IN THE YEAR 1776, ON SEVERAL PARTS OF GREAT BRITAIN, PARTICULARLY THE HIGH-LANDS OF SCOTLAND. By William Gilpin, A.M. 2 vols. 8vo. London: printed for R. Blamire, 1789. Vol. 1, p. 137, Verse from "Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer." Vol. 1, pp. 215-221, "The Cotter's Saturday Night." Vol. 2, p. 131, Verse from "Halloween."

ELEGANT EXTRACTS. [Edited by Vicesimus Knox.] 1789. First Edition. (See 1791. Extracts Elegant and Instructive, etc.). 8vo.

For a number of Notes regarding Burns's Contributions to the London Newspapers, from 27th March to 14th May, 1789, see "Burns Chronicle," No. 23, pp. 39-56 and pp. 65-71.

1790.

A SELECT COLLECTION OF POEMS FROM ADMIRED AUTHORS AND SCARCE MISCELLANIES WITH MANY PIECES NEVER

BEFORE PUBLISHED. 12mo. North Shields: W. Kelley, 1790. [Preface is dated April, 1790.] Pp. 139-146, "The Cotter's Saturday Night."

Pp. 146-148, "To a Mouse, on turning one up in her nest with the plough, Nov., 1785."

Pp. 148-150, "To a Mountain Daisy, on turning one down, with the plough, on April, 1786."

POEMS CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT. By Andrew Shirref, A.M., Edinburgh. Edinburgh: printed for the author by D. Willison, and for W. Creech and P. Hill, Edinburgh, and G. G. J. and J. Robinsons, London. Pp. viii.-ix., 337, 344, 352, various references to Burns. 8vo.

A PROVINCIAL GLOSSARY WITH A COLLECTION OF LOCAL PROVERBS AND POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS. By Francis Grose, Esq., F.S.A. The Second Edition, corrected and greatly enlarged. London: printed for S. Hooper, 8vo. Contains Grose's Peregrinations—a frontispiece with Quotations; p. viii. of Preface, refers to "my ingenious friend Mr. Burns the Airshire poet."

P. 49 of Popular Superstitions has "Halloween from Burns's Poems."

POEMS AND SONGS. By Saunders Tait of Tarbolton. 1790. Contains a poem on the birth of Bonnie Jean's Twins, Burns at Lochlen etc. (Only one copy known.)

Circa, 1790. Elegy on the year Eighty-Eight: Elegy on Puddin' Lizzie: Colin Clout a pastoral, etc. etc. Edinburgh: printed by David Willison. 16 pages.

POEMS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS. By James Fisher, 8vo. Dumfries: printed by Robert Jackson for the author, 1790. Contains references to R. B.

Circa, 1790. A Selection of the Most Favourite Scotch Songs, chiefly Pastoral. London: no date. Printed for William Napier; folio.

The Scots Musical Museum. Vol. 3, 8vo. Preface date, Feb. 2, 1790. Contains 40 songs of Burns.

Sermons (in Two Volumes). By John Dun, U.D.M. Kilmarnock: printed by J. Wilson, 1790, 8vo. Contains "The Deil's Answer to his Verra Friend," and "Burns' Charitable Wish." (John Dun, according to M'Kie, was Ebenezer Picken.)

Poems chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. By David Morison: Montrose: David Buchanan, 1790. Contains "The Deil's Reply." (18 stanzas.)

Poems consisting of Miscellaneous Pieces and Two Tragedies. By the late James Mylne of Lochiel. Edinburgh: printed for William Creech, 1790. 8vo. "To Mr. Burns on his Poems." R. B. occurs in a list of subscribers on page iv.

1791.

Das gelehrte England oder Lexicon de jetzt-lebenden Schriftsteller von Jeremias David Reuss. Berlin: 1791. Contains a brief notice of R. B. It is a dictionary of living English writers with brief notices of their works.

The Scots Magazine, 1791. 8vo. P. 307, Notice of the Death of Francis Grose. P. 339, Poetical Sketch of Francis Grose. P. 550, Burns's poem on Francis Grose.

The Bee. Edited by James Anderson. ? Vol. 1, 1791. 12mo. The Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn, was published in this work.

THE EDINBURGH COURANT. Published by David Ramsay. ? 1791. Contains "The peregrinations of Captain Grose."

THE EDINBURGH GAZETTEER. ? 1791. Contains "Extempore verses on the Commemoration of Thomson."

THE EDINBURGH MAGAZINE or LITERARY MISCELLANY. Vol. 14, [July-Dec., 1791.] 8vo. Contains Verses written by Mr. Burns, The Scots Poet, when Captain Grose was in Scotland, in 1790 (or 1791). (October number.)

"The Whistle," by Robert Burns, and verses "Written extempore by a friend of Mr. Burns on reading the above poem." (November number.)

THE EDINBURGH HERALD, 18th March, 1791. Contains Burns's "Tam O'Shanter."

THE BEE or LITERARY WEEKLY INTELLIGENCER. London. 1791, 12mo. Vol. 2, p. 319, contains Burns's letter to the Earl of Buchan.

THE BEE or LITERARY WEEKLY INTELLIGENCER. Consisting of Original Pieces, etc. etc. Edited by James Anderson, LL.D. Vol. 4, [July 13, 1791-Sep. 7, 1791.] 12mo. Edinburgh: printed for James Anderson. P. 59, Burns alluded to; p. 317, two verses of Epistle to James Smith, 7th Sept., 1791.

EXTRACTS, ELEGANT, INSTRUCTIVE AND ENTERTAINING, IN POETRY FROM THE MOST APPROVED AUTHORS, DISPOSED UNDER PROPER HEADS. [Edited by Vicesimus Knox.] 2 vols. 8vo. London: Rivingtons, Murray, etc. etc. 1791. Vol. 1, p. 54, "Despondency an Ode." Vol. 1, p. 161, "A Prayer in the Prospect of Death." Vol. 2, pp. 258-259, "To a Mouse." Vol. 2, p. 259, "To a Mountain Daisy."

THE EDINBURGH MAGAZINE or LITERARY MISCELLANY. Vol. 13, [Jan.-June, 1791.] 8vo. Edinburgh: J. Sibbald, etc.: London, J. Murray.

Pp. 243-245, "Aloway (*sic*) Kirk or Tam O'Shanter, a Tale. By Robert Burns." In March number, P. 498, "Epigram on Francis Grose," in an account of that gentleman.

THE GLASGOW COURIER, Saturday, 17th September, 1791. Contains "Verses written in Friars Carse Hermitage."

THE [GLASGOW] WEEKLY MISCELLANY OF INSTRUCTION AND ENTERTAINMENT. Printed by W. Bell, Saltmarket, Glasgow, 30th November, 1791. Contains "Verses written in Carse Hermitage by Nithside." By Robert Burns. (There is a further dateless copy of the above poem, published some time before the issue of the '93 edition. See Centenary Edition of Burns, Vol. 1, 418-9.)

ST. JAMES' CHRONICLE: May, 1791. Contains an account of Capt. Grose.

THE ANTIQUITIES OF SCOTLAND. By Francis Grose, F.A.S. 2 vols. 4to. London: S. Hooper. Vol. 1, p. xx. Contains a notice of Burns. Vol. 2, 199-201, "Tam O'Shanter, by my worthy friend, Mr. Burns."

(Vol. 1 is dated 1789, and the plate of Aloa (*sic*) Church, facing Vol. 2, p. 199, is dated 1st May, 1790.)

POEMS, PASTORAL, SATIRICAL, TRAGIC AND COMIC. By John Leamont [of] Dalkeith: Edinburgh, 1791. 8vo. Pp. 88-91, Man was not made to Mourn. Pp. 217-220, Answer to the Deil's Reply to Mr. Burns.

VERSES TO THE MEMORY OF JAMES THOMSON. [By Robert Burns.] (No date, no name of publisher or printer and no place.) ? Sept., 1791. Small 8vo. Consists of 4 leaves. On the back of title is printed "On Thursday the 22nd of September, 1791, at Two o'clock the ceremony of crowning the bust of Thomson the poet (Author of the Seasons) with a wreath of Bays was performed at Ednam Hill." (Only 3 copies known.)

1792.

OBSERVATIONS RELATIVE CHIEFLY TO PICTURESQUE BEAUTY MADE IN THE YEAR 1776 ON SEVERAL PARTS OF BRITAIN, PARTICULARLY THE HIGH-LANDS OF SCOTLAND. By William Gilpin, A.M. 2 vols. 8vo. Second Edition. London: printed for R. Blamire, Strand, 1792. Vol. 1, p. 137, Verse from "Author's earnest cry and Prayer." Vol. 1, pp. 215-221, "The Cottar's Saturday Night." Vol. 2, p. 131, Verse from "Halloween."

THE EDINBURGH MAGAZINE or LITERARY MISCELLANY. Vol. 16, [July-Dec., 1792.] 8vo. Edinburgh: Lawrie and Symington. London: J. Murray: 1792. P. 233, Notice of Burns, The Ayrshire Ploughman, in a list of living English Poets with Biographical Notes regarding them.

THE EDINBURGH GAZETTEER. ? 1792. The "Occasional address spoken by Miss Fontenelle—The Rights of Woman," was printed therein.

THE EDINBURGH MUSICAL MISCELLANY. Selected by D. Sime. Edinburgh, 1792, 12mo. Vol. 2, p. 352, contains "There's Naught but Care on every han'."

URBANI'S COLLECTION OF SONGS. No date [? 1792]. Contains "The Bonnie Lass of Ballochmyle."

THE POETICAL WORKS OF JANET LITTLE, THE SCOTCH MILKMAID. AIR: printed by John and Peter Wilson. 1792, 8vo. Contains "On a visit to Mr. Burns," pp. 111-112, "An Epistle to Mr. Robert Burns," pp. 160-163.

R. B. in a list of subscribers on page 9.

THE SCOTS MUSICAL MUSEUM: 8vo. Vol. 4, Aug. 13, 1792. Edinburgh: James Johnson.

THE STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF SCOTLAND. By Sir John Sinclair: 1792. Vol. 3, p. 598, Letter from R. B.

ESSAYS ON THE LIVES AND WRITINGS OF FLETCHER OF SALTOUN AND THE POET THOMSON WITH SOME PIECES OF THOMSON'S NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED. By David Stewart Erskine, Earl of Buchan. London: 1792, 8vo. Contains "Address to the Shade of Thomson on crowning his bust with a wreath of Bays. By Mr. Robert Burns."

1793.

THE NEW ANNUAL REGISTER FOR 1792. 8vo: London: 1793. Pp. 221-222 of Domestic Literature, "Address to the Shade of Thomson on Crowning his bust with a wreath of Bays. By Robert Burns."

THE SEASONS. By James Thomson. Edited by Robert Heron. Perth: Morison: 1793. Contains, "Address to the Shade of Thomson."

THE SCOTS MAGAZINE, 1793. P. 604, contains, "Sweet flow'ret of the rural shade. By R. B."

JOURNEY THROUGH THE WESTERN COUNTIES OF SCOTLAND. By Robert Heron: Perth, 1793. Notice of Burns and his Poems occur in a description of Ayr.

Catalogue of Engraved British Portraits. By Henry Bromley. London, 1793: 4to. Beugo engraving of Burns after Nasmyth is listed here.

The New Annual Register for 1792. Vol. 13: London, 1793. G. G. J. and J. Robinson. Contains, "Address to the Shade of Thomson by Mr. Robert Burns," pp. 221-222.

Original Scottish Airs. Edited by George Thomson. Vol. 1, 1793.

View of Agriculture in Ayrshire. By Colonel William Fullarton: 1793, Edinburgh. Contains a Notice of Burns.

1794.

The Morning Chronicle. 8th May, 1794. Contains "Scots Wha' Hae."

The Morning Chronicle. 10th May, 1794. Contains "Wilt thou be my dearie?"

Historical Essay on Scottish Songs. By Joseph Ritson: 1794. "Burns a natural poet of the first eminence."

Poems in English, Scotch and Latin. [By James Graham.] Paisley: printed by T. Neilson for the Author: 1794. Contains some lines on R. B. and a translation of "To a Mouse," in Latin. [Graham of "The Sabbath."]

Aloway (*sic*) Kirk or Tam O'Shanter, a Tale. By Robert Burns, The Ayrshire Poet. No date? [1794]. 8 pages.

Scotish Song. In Two Volumes. London: printed for J. Johnson and J. Egerton: MDCCIV (misdate for 1794). Vol. 1, pp. lxxiv-lxxv, Notice of R. B. Vol. 1, pp. 259-260, "Willie Brewed a peck o' Maut."

"Behind Yon Hills," A Song. By Robert Burns. Music by T. Ebdon, 1794.

The Lounger. Fifth Edition. 1794. London. 3 vols.

The Lounger. Sixth Edition. 1794. London. 2 vols.

The Scottish Register or General View of History, Politics and Literature. Vol. 2, [July-Dec., 1794]: Edinburgh: 8vo. P. 282, "Sonnet on the death of Robert Riddell, Esq. of Glenriddel. By Mr. Burns."

1795.

The Cottar's Saturday Night. By Robert Burns. London: printed by and for J. Roach, 1795.

The Glasgow Magazine. Vol. 1, Glasgow: printed by Ebenezer Miller, 1795. P. 155, Song by Robert Burns. ("O wat ye wha's in yon toun?" September number.)

The Scots Magazine. Vol. 57. (New Series, 2): 8vo. Edinburgh, 1795. Alexander Chapman and Co. and James Watson and Co. Contains, p. 313, "The Dumfries Volunteers, a Ballad by Mr. R. Burns"; p. 384, "To Mary in Heaven."

Scotland's Skaith or The History o' Will and Jean, Owre true a tale! together with some additional poems by the author of "The Harp" [Hector Macneill].

Edinburgh: [March], 1795; printed by Mundell & Son, for A. Guthrie. Contains a reference to Burns.

The Same. Second Edition. [July, 1795.]

An Address to the Deil with the Answer. By John Lauderdale (near Wigton). Printed in the year 1795. No place. [? Edinburgh.] 12mo. Consists of 4 leaves.

ROACH'S BEAUTIES OF THE MODERN POETS OF GREAT BRITAIN. Vol. 6: London, 1795, 12mo. Contains the "Cottar's Saturday Night."

FARE THEE WEEL THOU FIRST AND FAIREST: A SONG. By Robert Burns. Music by J. Watten. 1795.

THE DUMFRIES JOURNAL. May, 1795, Contains "Does Haughty Gaul Invasion Threat?"

THE HERON BALLADS. Nos. 1 and 2: February, 1795. (Broadsides.)

THE HERON BALLADS. No. 4, "John Bushby's Lamentation," 1795. (Broadside.)

A SUMMARY VIEW OF HERALDRY. By Thomas Brydson, F.A.S. Edinburgh: 1795, 8vo. Printed by Mundell & Son, for Nicol Egerton of London: Vernor & Hood.

Mr. Robert Burns and Mr. William Nicol among the subscribers.

1796.

THE DUMFRIES COURIER. July, 1796. Notice of Burns's death and works.

THE LONDON HERALD. July 27, 1796. Notice of Burns's death and works.

THE LADY'S MAGAZINE or ENTERTAINING COMPANION. Vol. 27: 1796, 8vo. Contains "On the Birth of a Posthumous Child. By Robert Burns," and a poem in Memory of R. B.

THE NEWCASTLE CHRONICLE. Saturday, 6th August, 1796: Folio. Contains "Verses to the Memory of R. Burns."

THE EDINBURGH ADVERTISER: July 26, 1796. Notice of Burns's death.

The Scots Magazine: Vol. 58, 1796. Edinburgh: 8vo. P. 506, Notice of Burns's death (in July number).

Liverpool Testimonials to the Genius of Burns, 1796. See Burns Chronicle, Vol. 1, p. 105.
(The Scott Douglas Kilmarnock Edition, 1871, Vol. 2, p. 420, has the same under date 1797.)

The Dumfries Journal.	26th July, 1796	All contain notices of death or funeral of R. B.
The London Star.	27th July, 1796	
The True Briton.	28th July, 1796	
The London Chronicle.	28th and 30th July, 1796	
The Morning Chronicle.	30th July, 1796	
The Edinburgh Advertiser.	29th July, 1796	
The Morning Chronicle.	1st Aug., 1796	
The London Star.	1st Aug., 1796	

The Hibernian Journal or Chronicle of Liberty. Wednesday, 3rd Aug., 1796. P. 3, contains an account of "Robert Burns, The Scotch Poet."

Monsieur Kaniferstane, a tale, to which is added a song ("A Man's a Man for a' that"). By Robert Burns. Glasgow: printed for R. Smith, Bookseller: Paisley, 1796. Chapbook of 8 pp.

The Edinburgh Evening Courant. Monday, 25th July, 1796. Contains Verses to the Memory of Burns.

Scottish Ballads and Songs, 12mo. Manchester: printed at the office of G. Nicholson, 1796. Contains "Now Westlin Winds, etc."

Censura Literaria. By Sir Egerton Brydges. Mention of Burns and Alloway Kirk in letter of Burns to Grose, published in this work.

ELEGANT EXTRACTS. (Edited by Vicesimus Knox.) 1796, 8vo. (Other editions published in 1789 and 1791.)

AN UNCO MOURNFU' TALE: to which is added the Antiquarian, by Robert Burns. (8 pages). Glasgow: printed for and sold by Stewart & Meikle. 1796. (Stewart & Meikle's edition of the "Twa Herds" and the lines on Captain Grose.)

THE SCOTS MUSICAL MUSEUM. By James Johnson. Vol. 5: Edinburgh. [December] 1796, 8vo.

THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE AND BRITISH REGISTER. 8vo. Vol. 2, July-Dec., 1796. London.
Notice of the death of R. B. (in August number).

THE EUROPEAN MAGAZINE. Vol. 30, July-Dec., 1796, 8vo. London. Pp. 78-79 and 266-270 contain an account of death and works of R. B.

THE ABERDEEN MAGAZINE. Vol. 1, June-Dec., 1796, 8vo. Aberdeen: Burnett and Rettie, 8vo. P. 217, "Account of Robert Burns, The Scotch Poet." P. 247, "Verses on Burns."

BUY BRAW TROGGIN: an Excellent New Song. Heron Ballads, No. 3, 2 pages. (Broadside.) [May] 1796.

AN ELEGIAC PASTORAL ON THE DEATH OF ROBERT BURNS. By Robert Lochore. [?end of 1796.]

THE NEW ANNUAL REGISTER FOR 1796. Vol. 17, 8vo: London: 1797. P. 76 of "Principal Occurrences" contains a notice of the death of R. B., the celebrated Ayrshire Poet.

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